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ABSTRACT

This monograph reports on an exploratory investigation of the impact of minimum competency testing on local schools. The implementation and impacts of test requirements in three Missouri and four Ohio local school districts are studied through interviews with teachers and administrators and through the analysis of written materials on the test and curricula. The focus is on how the testing programs affected the curriculum, teaching, the allocation of resources, the relationships between school and community, and how teachers responded to the program. Both the intended and unintended consequences are examined. The findings suggest minimum competency tests affect different schools in varying ways. Test programs can be formulated and implemented in ways that create anxieties and resentments among teachers, or in ways that gain their support. Even the administration of a common state test will affect different schools differently. Several general factors determine the impact, including the following: (1) the form and objectives of the test; (2) the level of local community interest in student test performances; and (3) the expectations of school leaders with respect to student performances. The public interdistrict comparisons of test results greatly affected the impact of the Missouri test mandate. (Author/LMO)

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MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTING AND LOCAL SCHOOLS

Karen S. Dawson

and

Richard E. Dawson

July, 1985

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Both authors were affiliated with the Department of Political Science at Washington University in St. Louis at the time of the research. The project was administered through the Center for the Study of Public Affairs of Washington University. Karen Dawson also had a Visiting Scholar appointment at the Mershon Center at The Ohio State University during 1982-83 academic year. We wish to acknowledge the assistance and support of Washington University, the Mershon Center, and the National Institute for Education.

The research involved conversations and interviews with administrators and teachers in seven different local school districts and with state level policy makers in both Missouri and Ohio. Without exception teachers, administrators and public officials cooperated with the project. This project could not have been carried out without their willingness to talk with us and to provide us with the materials we needed to understand the development of the minimum competency testing programs and their impacts. Administrators in each of the districts took an interest in the project and went out of their way to assist us. Their interest and efforts helped to make the research process easier and pleasureable.

We want to acknowledge the assistance and cooperation we received and to thank the school people for their time and interest.

Karen S. Dawson
Richard E. Dawson

Columbus, Ohio
July, 1985

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ABSTRACT

"Minimum Competency Testing and Local Schools."

This monograph reports on an exploratory investigation of the impact of minimum competency testing on local schools. The implementation and impacts of test requirements in three Missouri and four Ohio local school districts were studied through interviews with teachers and administrators and the analysis of written materials on the test and curricula.

The focus is on how the testing programs affected the curriculum, teaching, the allocation of resources, the relationships between school and community, and how teachers responded to the program. Both the intended and unintended consequences were looked at.

The findings suggest minimum competency tests affect different schools in varying ways. Test programs can be formulated and implemented in ways that create anxieties and resentments among teachers or in ways that gain their support. Even the administration of a common state test will affect different schools differently. Several general factors determine the impact: (1) The form and objectives of the test; (2) The level of local community interest in student test performances; and (3) The expectations of school leaders with respect to student performances. The public interdistrict comparisons of test results greatly affected the impact of the Missouri test mandate.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

I. MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTING AND LOCAL SCHOOLS.

A. Introduction.

During the 1970's minimum competency testing programs were adopted in rapid succession by state governments and local school districts across the nation. In less than a decade three-fourths of the states enacted some form of minimum competency testing requirement. Public concerns about student achievement and school performance had created a climate in which state and local bodies responsible for school policy felt the need to enact school accountability measures such as minimum competency testing. The concerns were felt at the national level as well. Though no national policy was adopted there was some interest in the Congress in the enactment of a national testing requirement. Among professional educators and groups involved in education policy there was considerable controversy about the wisdom of minimum competency testing requirements. Many public officials responsible for making policies for the public schools supported competency testing mandates. For the most part professional educators expressed skepticism and opposition.

As a consequence of competency testing mandates teachers and administrators in the majority of the schools across the nation have been faced with implementing some form of testing program. How have minimum competency testing programs affected local schools? What impact have they had on school practices? How have they affected curriculum and teaching? What have been the costs of program development and implementation? What impact have they had on teachers? How have teachers responded to them?

This research report addresses these questions. The monograph is based on the results of exploratory studies of the impact of competency testing programs in seven local school districts located in Missouri and Ohio. The focus is upon the impacts minimum competency testing programs have had on practices in local schools.

B. Minimum Competency Testing.

The requirements of minimum competency testing madates differ greatly from state to state. The programs implemented in local school districts vary in specific content, form, and objectives. The common elements of minimum competency testing include the designation of a set of "minimal basic skills" or "competencies" that students should acquire by a specified grade level, and the use of a specific test (or set of tests) to determine whether individual students have acquired those competencies. In many instances the failure of students to perform at prescribed levels has a specified consequence -- failure to graduate from high school, non promotion to the next grade level, assignment to a remedial course, retaking the test at a later date.

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In the formulation of most minimum competency testing programs the following four issues are addressed: (1) What skills are to be designated as "basic" or "essential" at particular grade levels or for high school graduation? (2) What specific level of skill attainment is to be considered minimal? (3) How is the acquisition of the requisite skills to be measured? (4) What consequences, if any, follow from the failure of the student to demonstrate the specified minimal proficiency.

Our primary interest is MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTING PROGRAMS; not so much the tests themselves. These PROGRAMS may include particular steps to prepare students for the examination(s) and to assist students who fail to meet required performance levels. Our studies of the impacts of programs in several local districts suggest that the activities surrounding the tests, such as pre-test exercises and remediation programs, often are as important as the test itself. Often these related activities have the most impact on the local schools. Local school impacts, such as the reordering of curricula, the reallocation of resources, and the reassignment of teaching responsibilities often occur in pre-test preparation efforts and post test remediation.

It is important to distinguish minimum competency testing from two other educational practices -- competency based education and achievement testing. Minimum competency testing is not synonymous with competency based education; though they share many assumptions about educational goals, structure and content. Minimum competency testing may, in fact, be a part of a competency based education program. One set of Ohio local districts included in our study is

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implementing a more comprehensive competency based education program. The tenth grade minimum competency test upon which our research focused is one component of that more comprehensive competency based education approach to school curriculum and structure. Similarly the Ohio mandate for competency testing requires districts to develop competency based education programs and to use a sequence of minimum competency tests as part of the program. Competency based education involves the establishment of clearly defined competency objectives for all educational levels. The objectives generally reflect an emphasis upon basic skills. The curriculum and classroom instruction are designed to fit those specific objectives, and student progress and success are measured in terms of those objectives. (For discussion on competency based education see: (Spady, 1977 and Spady and Mitchell, 1977)

Minimum competency tests must also be distinguished in design and purpose from academic achievement tests. Achievement tests are used widely in American schools to measure academic attainment and ability. They are employed to place students along a continuum of academic achievement and to differentiate among levels of individual academic ability. The function of minimum competency tests is different. They are designed to ascertain whether students have acquired a prescribed minimum level of competency and not to rank order them along a broad continuum. They are used to indicate the possession of specific knowledge or skills and not general intelligence or aptitude. Most

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minimum competency tests are not designed to discriminate among different levels of ability among students who have achieved those minimum competencies.

Competency testing programs vary widely in specific content. They stress different basic skills. Various minimum performance levels are established. Different forms of tests are used to measure competencies. Some programs entail extensive pre-testing and special preparation for the competency tests. Others assume that students should pick up the competencies in the regular curriculum and offer no specific test preparation. Some programs specify post-test diagnosis and remediation. Others do little or nothing to work with students who fail to pass the test. Programs may or may not include specific sanctions for students who fail to demonstrate minimum competencies. The several programs we look at represent considerable variation along these dimensions.

The emphasis of most minimum competency test programs is upon "basic skills" which are to be acquired prior to high school graduation. The specific skill areas tested differ among state and local programs. All programs test reading competency and most include writing and computation. Some include social studies and science. Many programs emphasize basic "life skills" or "coping skills." Most programs put emphasis upon the application of reading, writing, and computation to real life situations -- reading bus schedules and medicine labels, filling out a job application, computing mileage or interest rates.

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Many testing programs require the passing of a test or set of tests at a specified level of competency as one of the requirements for high school graduation. Some programs test competencies in earlier grades as well as high school. In some instances they include a sequence of tests at various grade levels throughout the school years. One of the Ohio cases specifies skill achievement tests in grades 3, 5, 7, and 10. Passage of the tenth grade test is required for graduation from high school. The testing in the earlier grades is used only for diagnosis and remediation.

Minimum competency testing programs have been adopted in response to concerns about school performance. They have been established to pursue a variety of general objectives, and in practice they serve an even wider range of purposes. In reviewing state competency testing programs and their effects, Mitchel Lazarus identified six goals which he found specified or implied in minimum competency testing programs:

> 1. To make the diploma meaningful by ensuring that people who carry it have at least the minimum ability to read, write, and compute--meaningful only in those states that have diploma sanctions, of course;
>
> 2. To help employers identify (through the diploma) job candidates who have these minimum skills;
>
> 3. To pressure students to acquire the minimum skills, and thus become more employable, better able to act as informed consumers, and better equipped for a satisfying life;
>
> 4. To pressure schools and teachers to provide more instruction in basics, less in "frills";

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> 5. To identify students who need remediation in the basic skills;
>
> 6. To create a consistent data base for monitoring the progress of education on a statewide basis. (Lazarus, 1981, pp. 6-7)

Lazarus goes on to suggest several motives sometimes ascribed to states and local districts that adopt competency testing requirements. These are:

> 1. To respond to political pressure to "do something" about the schools -- as quickly and inexpensively as possible;
>
> 2. To strengthen state influence over local education;
>
> 3. To support a management model that sees the educational system in factory terms, which requires a measurement of output;
>
> 4. To resegregate society by denying diplomas, and hence employment, to substantial numbers of minority youth while certifying the large majority of whites. (Lazarus, 1981, p. 7)

The latter four purposes reflect the arguments made by many who oppose minimum competency testing.

In assessing motivations and purposes of competency testing programs in the seven districts we found it useful to hypothesize three general goals or objectives applicable to competency testing programs. Each teacher and administrators we talked with was asked which of the three following general objectives best fit the program at his or her school.

> 1. ACCOUNTABILITY. To evaluate school performance and to hold schools accountable for assuring basic student performance.
>
> 2. STUDENT DIAGNOSIS. To diagnose individual student weaknesses and problems areas and direct them to specific remediation.

3. CURRICULUM EVALUATION. To review and evaluate the curriculum to see if it meets specified objectives.

Specific programs have been designed to persue each of these goals and various combinations of them. Different programs emphasize different objectives. Teachers and administrators within a given school system may view the same program as reflecting different purposes. Among the districts in our study there were significant differences in what administrators and teachers perceived as the major objectives of their competency testing programs. In some districts accountability is perceived as the predominant purpose of the tests. In others the diagnosis and remediation of individual student competencies is recognized as the major purpose.

C. The Minimum Competency Testing Movement.

During the 1970's three quarters of the states adopted some form of minimum competency mandate. The pressure for action was felt even in states which did not adopt a testing requirement during that period. Our discussion of state level activity in Ohio demonstrates this point. State adoptions of competency testing requirements began in the early 1970's. The momentum peaked in the late 1970's. Testing programs also were adopted by a number of local districts prior to, and in the absense of, a state requirement. Many observers refer to the rapid and widespread adoption of competency testing requirements as

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"the minimum competency testing movement." Commenting on the rapidity, scope, and significance of this movement, Chris Pipho wrote in 1980:

> In looking back on the state action taken over the past five years, it is evident that the minimum competency movement represents a unique reform effort in American education. Very few times, if at all, has an education reform idea swept through so many states in such a short period of time. (Pipho, 1980, p. 2.)

This rapid succession is particularly significant because state adoptions occurred in the absence of any requirement or incentive from the federal government. Widespread state adoption of similar policies is not rare. More often than not, the common action occurs as the result of requirements or incentives from Washington. Though there was discussion in Congress about enacting a federal requirement no federal mandate or incentives were adopted. The states acted on their own in adopting and fashioning competency testing programs.

The competency testing movement grew out of general public concerns about school performance and accountability. These concerns emerged in the early 1970's. They were manifested in a widely articulated and highly publicized perception that the public schools were not performing very effectively their basic task of providing all students with basic academic skills. Concern was expressed that many students who lack basic reading, writing, and computational skills were being promoted and even graduated from high school. Nationwide results on achivement tests, such as the

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widely used Scholastic Aptitiude Test, showed declines in overall achievement level . Nationwide school assessments, such as the "National Assessment of Educational Progress", also indicated declining student competencies. The receipt of a high school diploma did not seem to assure that a graduate had the basic skills needed to get along in the contemporary world. Commenting in 1978 on the interest in minimum competency achievement, John W. Porter, Michigan State Superintendent of Public Instruction, described the drive for competency testing in this way:

> The movement toward competency based education cannot be appropriately understood outside the context in which it is currently being promoted. It is a response to the feeling that many students are graduating from high school without the requisite skills either for achieving success in college or for securing and keeping an appropriate job. It is a response to the sudden discovery that scores on college entrance examinations have been declining. It is also a response to a feeling that youth are growing up to be undisciplined, unconcerned, and indifferent to their social obligations. ("The Wingspread Papers, 1978, p. 18)

Many found these trends particularly disconcerting because they followed a period of substantial programatic innovation and dramatic increases in school expenditures, including the growth of involvement by the federal government. Many forms of criticism were levied against the schools during the 1970's, but the perception that they were failing to provide students with basic academic skills was a predominant concern. Many public officials responsible for funding the public schools, especially at the state level, wanted ways to assess how the schools were doing, to make

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them more accountable for their actions, and to force them to pay more attention to the teaching of the basics.

State legislators, in particular, felt pressure to respond to these concerns. State legislatures and state boards of education were confronted with two somewhat contradictory pressures regarding the public schools. On the one hand, they were under pressure from local school boards, teachers, and administrators to provide more state money for public schools. State governments were being asked to assume a larger share of the growing cost of public education. On the other hand, the state bodies responsible for public school governance were cognizant of a growing public criticism that the schools were not performing well. They saw this manifested in the increased resistance to pay higher taxes for public education.

Given these cross-currents, it is not suprising that state level policy makers -- especially state legislators -- were interested in tools to hold schools accountable. Our discussion of state level activity in Ohio describes the sequence of measures promoted within the legislature in response to the growing concern about school performance -- accountability measures, annual assessments, and minimum competency testing. Though specific programatic outcomes vary, it is likely that most states saw similar sequences of proposals. Programatic ideas and experiences were communicated from state to state. By the mid-1970's minimum competency testing emerged in most states and in many local districts as the most popular tool for responding to

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concerns about school performance. Many states and local districts adopted programs or mandates for judging school performance, holding the schools accountable, and forcing greater emphasis upon basic student competencies.

These factors help account for the minimum competency movement. They explain why many states moved quickly to embrace competency testing, either by adopting state wide test programs or by requiring local districts to develop and implement their own programs. In some instances programs were adopted without consideration of how they would be implemented or their potential for local schools.

The impetus for minimum competency testing, especially at the state level, was largely "political." For the most part minimum competency testing programs came as external requiremets rather than internal reforms. Organizations representing teachers and school administrators tended to oppose testing programs, especially the imposition of state mandates. Our studies of two locally initiated programs in Ohio suggests the locally motivated adoption may be somewhat different. In these two cases school leaders were closely involved in program initiation and development. In one the idea for developing a competency program originated among school leaders and there is no evidence of external community interest or pressure.

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At the state level programs were adopted in reponse to vaguely articulated interests or demands among the general public, not as result of organized pressure. Speaking to this point in his description of the movement Chris Pipho argues:

> Minimum competency testing mandates ... have not had any predominant educational leadership or support. For the most part, educators have spoken out and written in opposition to the movement. It is probably fair to say that the minimum competency movement, supported for the most part by noneducators, has moved through 38 states without any centralized support and no single agency or groups of people playing an advocate role. (Phipo, 1980, p. 2.)

The peak years for program adoption by state legislatures were 1977 and 1978, when twenty-five states enacted programs. Only a few states enacted programs after 1978. Missouri's state wide test requirement was enacted in 1978. Though Ohio resisted the adoption of a state policy until 1982, the most intense state level activity on the issue was in 1978. In programs adopted during the 1975 - 1977 period the emphasis was upon using tests to determine whether students should graduate from high school. In the late 1970's program adoption reflected a shift away from graduatation requirements and toward the use of "early warning tests", the results of which could be used for providing remediation and improving instructional programs. Both the incidence of program adoption and the speed of implementation slowed in the early 1980's. Original implementation schedules often were extended and provisions altered or eliminiated. Public interest and political pressuresd had waned. (Pipho, 1983)

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Reflecting the "political" impetus behind the movement state legislatures played unusually active roles in the adoption of testing programs. Final programs were variously enacted by state boards of education or state legislatures. However, even in states in which programs were enacted by state boards, such as Missouri and Ohio, the board was responding more often than not to pressure from the legislature.

The most significant variation among state mandates centers around the use of a common state test or set of tests. A common state test is used in somewhat more than half of the states with minimum competency testing mandates. Following the tradition of greater state control over public schools almost everyone of the southern states has a state mandate which requires the use of a state prescripted test. The midwestern states, with their tradition of local control, have opted almost exclusively for mandates requiring local districts to develop their own tests. Despite its strong tradition of local district autonomy Missouri followed the pattern of the southern states in requiring the use of the Basic Essential Skills Test in all Missouri districts. At the time we began the study Ohio was among the minority of states -- concentrated in the midwest -- that did not have a state mandate. At the present time Ohio has a mandate requiring local districts to develop their own testing programs.

D. Minimum Competency Testing and Education.

The minimum competency testing movement has generated considerable controversy and debate. Educators and public officials involved in educational policy have argued vigorously about the benefits and liabilities of minimum

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competency testing. Education periodicals have carried numerous articles dealing with testing programs and their consequences. A short listing of titles provides a sense of the concerns expressed and the flavor of the debate: "What are the Social Implications of Minimum Competency?" (Baratz, 1979); "The Costs of Legislated Minimal Competency Requirements" (Anderson and Lesser, 1978); "What Are The Educational Consequences of Minimum Competency" (Airasian, 1979); "Digging at the Roots of the Minimum Competency Movement" (Kohn, 1979); "Competency Testing: Potential for Discrimination" (McClung, 1977); "Are Competency Testing Programs Fair? Legal? (McClung, 1978); "Sociodemographic Implications of Minimum Competency Testing" (Eckland, 1980); "Minimum Competency Testing: Psychological Implications for Students" (Blau, 1980); and "Goodbye to Excellence: A Critical Look at Minimum Competency Testing. (Lazarus, 1981).

For the most part the writing on minimum competency testing has been descriptive and polemical. State programs have been described and compared. A series of reports on state activities on minimum competency testing were published by Chris Pipho of the Education Commission of the States. Funded by the National Institute of Education, these reports provide state by state descriptions of the status of state minimum competency activities. They chronicle state activities on competency testing over several years and provided useful information for the analysis of the minimum competency movement and comparative

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state policy analysis. (Pipho, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983) A second publication by William Phillip Gorth and Marcy R. Perkins, "A Study of Minimum Competency Testing Programs", provides a more indepth description of both state and local districts testing policies and programs. (Gorth and Perkins, 1979) This study describes and compares state and local policies; including information on test development, goals and purposes of the individual programs, target populations, test administration, etc. Neither of these works offers theoretically based explanations or analyses of the processes and consequences of local program implementation.

There is now a rather extensive polemical literature on testing programs with authors arguing for or against the programs and predicting either positive or negative consequences for public education. There has been controversy over whether the tests should be used, who should use them, who should administer them, what form they should take, what sanctions for students should follow, and what financial and organizational commitments need to be made for the programs to work successfully. THE WINGSPREAD PAPERS: A REPORT OF THE MINIMUM COMPETENCY MOVEMENT (1978) and the May 1978 issue of PHI DELTA KAPPAN both contain sets of position papers that discuss these issues. A 1980 volume edited by Richard M Jaeger and Carol Kehr Tittle also provides a series of essays dealing with minimum competency testing. (Jeager and Tittle, 1980)

The legal and educational equity aspects of minimum

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competency testing have received considerable attention. These concerns have included the consequences of the testing programs for particular population groups such as the handicapped, linguistic and racial minorities, and other "disadvantaged" who might tend to do less well on standardized tests. Legal and equity issues have been raised about the content and form of the tests themselves. Are they valid measures of competencies? Are they free from cultural or racial bias? Are they related closely enough to the particular curriculum or instruction provided by the schools? Other issues center around the presence of or the adequacy of remedial programs associated with the tests and policies for withholding omotion or high school graduation from those who fail to meet the designated standards (See: Baratz, 1979; Beckham, 1980; and McClung, 1980; and Tractenberg, 1980)

A good description of legal challenges is found in an article by Paul Tractenberg, "Legal Implications of Minimum Competency Testing: Debra P. and Beyond,". (Tractenberg, 1978) Tractenberg examines the constitutional and statutory issues involved in minimum competency testing, including equal protection and due process clauses of the 14th Amendment. The most highly publicized court case pertaining to minimum competency testing is the Florida case of DEBRA P. VS. TURLINGTON. Florida was one of the first states to embrace minimum competency testing and adopted a program which required the demonstration of minimum competencies as a requirement for graduation. The case of DEBRA P. VS.

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TURLINGTON questioned whether the test requirement had a discriminatory impact on blacks and other minority students who had experienced inferior and segregative education in the past. The court enjoined the state from carrying out the graduation requirement of the testing program for four years. This was done to assure a "reasonable period" during which students in Florida would be in a unitary (non-segregative) school system. This case and others pertaining to the Florida test program created considerable concern about the legal consequences of minimum competency testing among educators and policy makers -- especially about the use of sanctions in cases where students failed to meet the minimum standards.

Though there has been some discussion of the impact of minimum competency testing on students, little attention has been given to the impact of the programs on the schools. There has been speculation about potential impacts, but almost no empirical work on what takes place in local schools as a result of minimum competency testing. Among the issues of conjecture are the possibility that minimum competency programs might result in more standardized and narrowly focussed curricula, more centralized decision making, the reallocation of school resources toward test preparation and remediation, and resegregation of students. There are, of course, pros and cons about these potential consequences. Some argue that more directed curriculum focus and the reallocation of resources to the "basics" and on the preparation for good performance on competency tests

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are commendable objectives. (Turlington, 1979) Others see dangers in such developments. (See, for example, Cawelti, 1978) Mitchell Lazarus notes many of these concerns in his book, GOODBYE TO EXCELLENCE: A CRITICAL LOOK AT MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTING. Speculating on the long run impact of minimum competency testing he says: "The most serious outcome is likely to be an end to the quest for excellence in our schools. The testing scheme is meant to raise the floor of education -- but it may bring down the ceiling as well." (Lazarus, 1981, p. 28)

The cost of minimum competency testing programs has also been an issue of concern. Anderson and Lesser addressed the issue of resource allocation in an article entitled, "The Costs of Legislated Minimum Competency Requirements." (Anderson and Lesser, 1978) They argue that one consequence of the implementation of minimum competency requirements could be enormously costly on-going programs. The burden of these costs would fall upon both the local school district and the states. Anderson and Lesser speculate that given substantial state contributions for remediation there could be a tendency for local districts that receive large state payments for remediation to become dependent upon these payments. Under these circumstances they might have little incentive to improve test results when the improvement would lead to less state money.

At the time we formulated our study there was little empirical research on the impact of testing programs on local schools. The lack of work in this area stemmed, in

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part, from the newness of the programs. In many instances the programs had not existed long enough to study their impacts. In addition, the "political" and controversial nature of the competency testing movement meant that concerns and attention focused on other issues -- especially understanding how and why testing programs were being adopted and discussions of their educational relevance. Arguments as to the purpose and validity of particular tests and on competency tests in general also were of particular concern. Jaeger and Tittle speak to this point in the introduction to their edited volume, MINIMUM COMPETENCY ACHIEVEMENT TESTING:

> The hurried development of minimum competency testing programs has necessitated educators immediate attention to the pragmatic questions of competency definition, test development, standard setting, and program operations. Comparatively little attention has been directed to such larger issues as the need for minimum competency testing, the problems it seeks to solve, its likely effects on the structure and operation of the schools, and its consequences for those directly involved in elementary and secondary educations, as well as for our larger society. (Jaeger and Tittle, 1980, p. vii)

In this monograph we address some of these "neglected issues"; looking at the impact of minimum competency testing programs on local school practices.

E. Local School Impact.

We became interested in the impact of testing programs on local schools as a consequence of living in Missouri when the mandate requiring a state test at the eighth grade went into effect. The public reporting of test score results by

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school districts created considerable public reaction. The public reaction, in turn, influenced the way the schools responded to the testing. It became clear that the test was having a number of impacts on the local schools. Some of these consequences had been anticipated by program developers. For example, schools were reviewing their curricula. In some schools teachers and building administrators felt under great pressure to raise student test scores, one way or another. Some instances of teacher and school condoned cheating were reported.

As a result of our observations of these reactions we became particularly interested in the public nature of the tests and the factors that resulted from the public inter-district comparisons. The public comparisons appear to have taken on a dynamics of their own, affecting how the tests were used and how they affect local school practices. This issue will be discussed below, especially in our description of the impact of the Missouri Basic Essential Skills Test.

These observations sparked our initial concern with test impact. In particular, we became interested in two issues that are important components of this analysis: (1) how the same test requirement can be responded to in very different ways; and, (2) the significance of "unintended consequences" that have followed the introduction of competency testing. The public focus on inter-district comparisons, which became an important part of the test impact in Missouri, is a good example of such an unintended

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consequence. Our reading of the literature on minimum competency testing and our background as students of education policy led us to believe that the question of how minimum competency testing programs affect local school practices is a worthwhile topic for empirical research. The issues are timely and have practical and theoretical significance.

Using information gathered from exploratory case studies of seven local school districts, we analyze the impact of testing programs on important local school practices and relationships. In this analysis we are not interested in the validity of particular tests, in the appropriateness of the basic skills designated, nor in the impact of the testing programs on student motivation and skills. Those issues deserve study and attention. However, as political scientists interested in the formation, implementation and consequences of education policies we seek to understand how such programs are formulated and what impact they have on local school practices.

This study is not a policy implementation or policy evaluation study in the more specialized use of those terms. Our concern is not directed to specifying what the goals of the policies and programs are, ascertaining whether or not the provisions have been implemented, and determining whether the goals have been achieved. In a less structured way, our approach is to take as a given the implementation of a particular competency program and to ascertain what impacts that implementation has had in specified areas.

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More specifically, we discuss the impact of minimum competency testing programs on the following:

1. The school curriculum.
2. Teaching practices -- how teachers teach their classes, allocate class time, work with students and are evaluated
3. The allocation (or reallocation) of resources in the school.
4. How teachers and administrators evaluate and use the testing programs.

In this first report on the findings of these exploratory case studies we present detailed descriptions and interpretations of the impacts of test requirements in each of the districts and draw out some generalizations from those experiences. The discussion and analysis will be developed as follows. In the next chapter the research design and field work used in the empirical case studies will be described. This will be followed by reports of the field work and case studies, first the Missouri part and then the Ohio components. For each state we will discuss state level actions and then report individually on the program and its impact in each of the local districts.

Following the descriptions of impact in the local districts we develop generalizations and make comparisons. In the last section we draw forth conclusions that might be useful to policy makers as they work in this area on program development, implementation, evaluation and revision.

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II. RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS.

A. Introduction.

This monograph is based on field research carried out in seven local school districts during the 1982-83 academic year. Three of the districts are in Missouri. Four are located in Ohio. At the time of the study each of the districts had a minimum competency testing program in place. The three Missouri districts were administering a state developed Basic Essential Skills Test (BEST). Each local district was responding to the imposition of the common test requirement in its own way. The four local districts in Ohio were implementing locally initiated programs. In the absence of any state requirement the Ohio districts had developed their own competency testing program.

Seeking to understand the impact of the test requirements on the local schools we talked extensively with district and building administrators. We also interviewed secondary school teachers to get their perceptions and evaluations of the program in their particular school. Written materials on curricula and test programs were also reviewed.

In addition to the local district field work we interviewed state legislators and education leaders in both Missouri and Ohio to learn about state level action on

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minimum competency testing in the two states. In Missouri this was necessary in order to understand the purpose and content of the state developed test. In Ohio the state activity, though not as directly relevant, is an important part of the context in which the local districts acted.

B. Research Approach: Exploratory Case Studies.

An exploratory case study format was used to investigate the impact of competency testing programs in the districts. This entailed relatively in-depth, on-site investigations in a few local school districts. Two factors influenced the exploratory and small scale approach. First, we wanted to conduct the field work ourselves, to do it within a year's time, and to accomplish it with a limited budget. Second, the fact that there had been little systematic, empirical work on the impact of minimum competency testing programs on local schools meant that we had no research base on which to build.

Lacking explicit hypotheses and firm expectations about the range of impacts, we felt it important to spend sufficient time in each of the seven districts. We wanted a research approach that would permit us to discover the unanticipated consequences as well as those which were planned or expected. These factors precluded the use of a large scale survey designed to investigate systematically a set of hypotheses. With five to seven local districts we felt we would be able to spend sufficient time talking with relevant people in each district to get a good picture of

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how the districts had responded to competency testing programs and what impacts the programs had had on particular school practices.

C. Selection of Districts.

The first basic research decision was the selection of local school districts. Initially we planned to select a set of four or five local districts in Missouri and to focus exclusively on the impact of the state developed Missouri Basic Essential Skills Test in those districts. This made sense for a number of reasons. We were located in Missouri and had observed the more public consequences that followed the introduction the Missouri test program. In addition, we had done some preliminary investigation of the content and development of the Missouri BEST. Missouri is an example of a state requiring each district to use a common state determined test. The same test is used in districts that vary in size, resources, composition of the student population, and curriculum content and structure. A study of a variety of Missouri districts would permit us to ascertain how different types of districts respond to the external imposition of a common test requirement. Our analysis of the three Missouri districts and a more limited knowledge of responses in a wider range of districts in that state suggest how differently districts have responded to to the same test requirement.

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When we found we would be spending the 1982-83 academic year in Ohio, we decided to expand the study to include several Ohio local school districts. This altered the focus of the study and added important new dimensions. At that point Ohio had no state test requirement. However, several Ohio districts had self initiated minimum competency testing programs. With the inclusion of self initiated programs in Ohio we can observe the dynamics and consequences of locally developed test programs; along with those of districts required to implement a specific state test. This broadens the scope of what we can say about the dynamics and impact of competency testing programs. Using both Missouri and Ohio local school districts we can both see how several districts have responded to the same state requirement and compare state imposed and self initiated programs.

An initial inquiry into existing programs in Ohio suggested there were only a few districts with operating secondary level competency testing programs and that these were located within major metropolitan areas. The original research design was based on suburban districts. As we began the study we learned about a set of small rural school districts in Ohio that were implementing a jointly developed competency testing program. We decided to replace one of the suburban districts with the three small rural/small town districts. The Ohio districts include a relatively large suburban district, located in one of the states largest urban areas and the three small rural districts.

The design of the Missouri component of the study was altered also to include a nonsuburban Missouri district. Of the three Missouri districts two are located in suburbs of one of the state's largest metropolitan centers and the

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other serves a small town and surrounding rural area.

The inclusion of these smaller non-metropolitan districts add considerably to the richness of the study and to our knowledge about how competency testing programs affect local schools. The case descriptions and the comparisons developed below indicate that different types of districts respond differently to competency testing programs.

The selection of local districts will be discussed in more detail in the sections dealing with the Missouri and Ohio case studies. The data in Table II-a, below outline the basic district characteristics and the type of program operative in each district. The districts vary in size of student body and in resources available to the schools. Each of the districts is implementing a competency testing program which includes a basic minimum competency test at the junior high or high school level. In order to preserve anonymity each of the districts has been given a fictitious name. These fictitious names are used throughout the text. They are also used in the district specific citations in the references.

We can not claim to have a representative sample of American school districts, or even the districts of Ohio and Missouri. The Ohio districts were basically self-selected. The Missouri districts were chosen to include some diversity in location, student composition, and resource base. However, there is no basis to claim they represent the more than four hundred local school districts in the state.

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TABLE 11a.

Key Characteristics of Districts in Study.

District	No. of Pupils	Per Pupil Expenditure	District Population	Year Test Began	Grade Test Given	No. of Schools	Graduation Requirement
Ohio 1	10,778	$2,364	Suburb of large metro. substantial tax base	1979	10th	2	Yes
Ohio 2	758	1,926	Rural/Small Town	1981	10th	1	Yes
Ohio 3	1,316	2,150	Rural/Small Town	1981	10th	1	Yes
Ohio 4	1,344	1,966	Rural/Small Town	1981	10th	1	Yes
Mo. 1	4,661	2,508	Middle class suburb of large metro area	1978	8th	2	No
Mo. 2	5,289	1,929	Mixed suburb of large metro; substantial black enrollment	1978	8th	1	Yes
Mo. 3	2,887	1,862	Medium sized town and adjacent rural areas	1978	8th	1	No

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There are no large city districts, nor districts located in poor rural areas. The inclusion of a large city district would have been useful but it was not feasible for us to undertake a comparable investigation in a large city district. With limited time and resources we were not in a position to undertake such a task. In Ohio we were, of course, limited to districts that had in place the type of competency testing program we were interested in.

The range of districts included in the study and the type of investigation we carried out within each of schools allows us to say something about the dynamics of the implementation of test programs and how they can affect local schools. The individual case descriptions and the relationships noted in this study can serve as a foundation for more systematic and comprehensive studies. The information from this study can be used for the formulation of hypotheses to be tested in future studies.

The findings of this study should also be useful for policy-makers concerned with formulating, implementing, evaluating, and/or revising minimum competency testing programs. The experiences of these districts with their particular programs, or in implementing a state imposed test, provide lessons that have applicability to many other situations.

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D. Research Activities and Schedule.

The field research was carried out between September 1982 and the end of June, 1983. The major component of the investigation entailed the local district case studies.

Several days were spent in each of the districts during that time. Interviews were conducted with district and building administrators, with guidance counselors, and with teachers. Involved citizens and school board members were also interviewed in the Missouri districts. In the Ohio districts both interview and written materials were used to get information on the reason for and the processes of test program development. Written materials on test programs, test results, remediation programs, and school curricula from each district were collected and analyzed.

Though the major emphasis and research effort focused on the local districts, we also looked at state level activity on minimum competency testing in both Missouri and Ohio. During the fall of 1982 we talked with officials at the State Department of Education in Missouri to learn how and why the decision to require the Basic Essential Skills Test was made and to get a picture of the process of implementation from the perspective of the state. In Ohio we interviewed personnel at the State Department of Education, several state legislators and the representatives of some of the major education interest groups in order to understand how Ohio had responded to the minimum competency testing movement. The findings of this part of the research are reported at the beginning of the sections on each state.

The following basic schedule was used in laying out and conducting the field research:

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1. Sept. 1982 - Dec. 1982

During the fall of 1982 we spent time in the capital cities of Columbus, Ohio and Jefferson City, Missouri learning about state level activity on minimum competency testing. In Missouri this meant learning about the development and administration of the Basic Essential Skills Test. In Ohio we interviewed state legislators and officials at the State Department of Education to determine how Ohio had dealt with the pressure to adopt a competency testing mandate. Conversations with persons at the Ohio State Department of Education also helped us locate local districts that had competency testing programs and to decide which ones to include in the study.

The districts to be used in the study were selected during this period and contact was made with district administrators. An initial visit was made to each area to explain the study and to obtain permission to conduct the field research. In each of the districts we met with the superintendent or another top administrator closely involved in the administration of the testing program. Initial descriptions of the programs were obtained.

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2. Jan. 1983 - April 1983.

After getting consent to carry out the field research in each of the districts and obtaining initial information about the programs we met with other administrators involved in the test programs. In the larger districts this meant talking with other district level administrators. In all districts it entailed interviewing building principals and guidance counselors in schools where the tests were given. The guidance counselors were interviewed because they were generally involved in administration of the tests and in keeping the individual student scores. We were particularly interested in the guidance couselors' perceptions of how much and for what purposes the test scores were used. In the Missouri districts the focus was on junior high or middle schools; in the Ohio districts it was on the senior high schools. We also talked with high school administrators and a few high school teachers in the Missouri districts to get an idea of what happened after students went on to the high school. In the larger Ohio district we talked with the principals at the three junior high schools since preparatory testing and remediation was done there. In interviewing the administrators we used an outline of issues to be discussed to assure consistency, but the interviews did not follow a set format. (A copy of the interview outline is in Appendix A.) We wanted to let these interviews go off into directions determined in the interview. The number of these interviews varied from district to district, with more interviews carried out in the larger districts in which there were more administrators involved.

From these interviews we got basic information about the content and structure of the program, the processes of administration, and the evolution of the program as it was implemented. We also got the perceptions of the

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administrators on how the programs were working and the impact they were having on the local schools.

3. April 1983 through June, 1983

After we had completed most of the administrator interviews and reviewed the written materials available on the test program we turned our attention to the teachers most closely involved in the test programs. By this point we had a good understanding of program structure and content and how the tests were administered. Teacher perceptions and evaluations were one of the most important objectives of the study. We sought to interview those teachers who taught subjects associated in subject matter and grade level of the tests and those involved in test related remediation. In the Missouri districts this meant junior high or middle school English, math and social studies teachers. In the set of three small Ohio districts it meant English and math teachers and those teachers involved in post test remediation. In the larger Ohio district we interviewed math, English and government teachers in the two high schools.

A common, structured interview schedule was used in interviewing the teachers. By the time we interviewed the teachers we had considerable knowledge about the test programs and the processes of implementation. In addition there were many teachers to interview and only a limited amount of interview time for each teacher. The interviews were held during teachers' free period during the regular

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school day. This meant that the interviews had to be done within the 30 - 45 minutes or so of that particular period.

At each school the principal provided us with a list of teachers working with courses related to the test areas. We indicated who we wished to interview and set some particular dates we would be in the district for interviewing. The school administrators worked out the schedules for individual teacher interviews. Prior to the interview each teacher was sent a letter explaining the study and a short questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to get basic background information on the teacher, including information on teaching experience and test related courses taught. This was sent to the teachers prior to the interview so that we could use the limited interview period to obtain other information. Teachers were asked to bring the completed questionnaire to the interview. The interviews with teachers lasted from twenty-five minutes up to an hour. In most instances they were limited to the length of the teacher's free period. In each instance we went through the basic interview schedule, though teachers were encouraged to offer additional comments on the testing programs.

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The number and types of persons interviewed in each of the seven districts are presented in Table II-b, below. Copies of the interview schedules used in the administrator and teacher interviews and the pre-interview questionnaire sent to teachers are found in Appendix A.

We collected two types of additional information in the three Missouri districts. Because the public nature of the

TABLE IIb

NUMBERS AND TYPES OF LOCAL DISTRICT INTERVIEWS.

Total Interviews - 149

By School District:

Missouri Gardenway -	38
Missouri Franklin -	28
Missouri Riverton -	22
Ohio Bethesda -	31
Ohio Gen. Taylor -	9
Ohio Candinal Central -	11
Ohio Winchester -	9

By Type of Position:

Teachers -	91
Counsellors -	14
Administrators -	29
School Board and Citizens -	15

test results loomed so important in Missouri and the tests seemed a significant component of the relationship between the schools and the communities we also interviewed some school board members and citizens who were active in school affairs. We did not do this systematically in the Ohio districts because the public relations and accountability aspects of the testing programs seemed less important there. Public inter-district comparisons did not play the same role in the Ohio districts.

In the Missouri districts we also did a systematic analysis of curriculum content to identify changes related to the introduction of the BEST. We wanted to see whether or not the introduction of the test had led to changes in course content or sequencing. For example, the eighth grade BEST had questions on government and economics. In many school districts civics courses were offered in the nineth grade. This discrepency created considerable concern in some districts and led to curriculum changes.

With respect to the fit between test and curriculum the Missouri and Ohio districts are in different positions. In Missouri each district had to use a state developed test. That test may or may not fit exisiting curriculum. If it did not the local schools often altered curricula to coincide with test content. In Ohio the local districts developed their own programs with their own objectives and curricula in mind. They did not have problem of adjusting to an externally determined test. Thus, the systematic analysis of curriculum change was not relevant for the Ohio

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districts.

Administrators and teachers were helpful and cooperative in the conduct of the study. District-and building administrators went out of their way to talk with us, to provide us with materials, and to arrange for us to meet with the teachers. They showed considerable interest in our study. This study could not have been carried out without their cooperation and support.

In this monograph the focus is upon individual local school districts and how they were affected by minimum competency test requirements. We combine the interview data with the analysis of written materials to describe and analyze how the requirements were implemented at the appropriate schools and the impacts they had on selected school practices. We then draw some comparisons, generalizations and lessons from the several local district experiences.

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PART TWO

MISSOURI

in the development of the BEST, we tried to answer the question of "Why the State Department of Education Chose to Initiate a MCT?"

By 1975 the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools were interested in a state test. While Department of Education staff in Testing and Assessment and Pupil Personnel Services tended to voice opposition to a state-mandated test, there was a national and state climate conducive to passing a MCT:

1. Impetus for the Best:

In exploring the immediate impetus to develop a state-mandated test, rather than a voluntary test, it is important to understand the climate of opinion, the various interest groups' positions on this issue, and the fact that Missouri has a strong norm of local autonomy and a tradition of a weak Board of Education in so far as state controls are concerned. The BEST was then out-of-character, so to speak, in the working relationship between the State Department of Education and local school districts.

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The State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools seemed to be in agreement about "a test". It is unclear whether the Superintendent was only responding to the Board's interest in a test, but he supported the idea in discussions with other staff members. The important factors serving as an impetus to the timing on the test seemed to be:

(a.) The legislature's interest in this area and a concern the State Department of Education had about controlling the test; they did not want legislation in this area and argued strongly against it. There was legislative activity in the House for "something" in the area of MCT. The state Senate wanted educational "accountability", but was generally inactive in proposing legislation. In the fall of 1974 the state legislature appropriated one-fourth million dollars for an elementary and secondary testing program. This represented the start up costs for the 4th and 6th grade voluntary tests. There was also discussion, though no legislation at this time for a mandated state test.

(b.) The Farm Bureau was a prime mover for a test. Spokespeople for the Farm Bureau said to the staff, "You either do it (a test) or we'll legislate it." The Education Department's major lobbyist with the legislature said that they had no choice...if the department didn't do it, the legislature probably would.

(c.) Besides the Farm Bureau, the State Board had received many unsolicited letters (the number was put at "maybe 1,000") asking the State Board to do something about quality of education, accountability, and concerns about standards. These letters came from all over the state and from a range of people: editors, business people, media, labor, farm bureau, concerned teachers, parents, students. These letters from their constituents had a "tremendous impact" on the State Board, who felt that they had a mandate from the people to do something. These letters also were

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persuasive with Department staff.

(d.) The Missouri Council on Economic Education and the Missouri Bar Association were very pro-BEST. Their subject matters are also reflected in the economics/government BEST sub-test.

(e.) On the other side there was no group actively against the test. The Missouri National Educational Association was against a MCT, but didn't lobby actively and no one else came out against it, including school people.

(f.) State feelings reflected the national mood that schools were not educating students. Test scores were down nationally, and the State Board was concerned about the situation in Missouri.

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B. BEST Chronology:

The following chronology provides a time frame for the development of the BEST.

April 20, 1976--State Board directed the Department to develop a test.

May 20, 1976--The State Commissioner of Education appointed a seven member committee of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education personnel to do a comprehensive study and direct development of the test.

June 25-July 29, 1976--Seven-member committee meetings and individual meetings with subject matter specialists; students; parents; college and university officials; business, labor, and agriculture personnel.

June 28, 29, 30, 1976--Developed role and function for a state advisory group representative of all educational groups and organizations; students; parents; media, business, labor, and agriculture; and school board members.

July 6-9, 1976--Selected advisory council and invited them to participate.

July 12-28, 1976--Developed tentative list of objectives.

July 12-September 10, 1976--Committees chosen by chairman to review and recommend changes in tentative objectives.

August 23-27, 1976--Prepared preliminary program for regional conferences.

August 30-September 3, 1976--Executive committee (assistant commissioners) reviewed and recommended changes in tentative objectives.

September 1, 1976--Identified and invited Missouri subject matter specialists to assist in the development of questions to be used on the test.

September 2, 1976--Provided interim report to State Board.

September 9-10, 1976--Rank ordered objectives.

Continuous--Prepared reports for public information.

September 9-10,29-30, 1976--Convened the subject matter specialists.

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September 16-17, 1976--Gave oral report to State Board.

September 20-October 11, 1976--Selected a sample of the schools in the state and secured cooperation in field testing the items.

September 30-November 1,1976-- Assembled test items for field test and sent to participating schools.

October 1-November 8, 1976--Conducted the eleven Regional Conferences on BEST.

November 15-December 15, 1976--Local schools administered the field test items, secured student reactions to test, and provided teacher recommendations.

December 15-January 1, 1977--Scored test items and analyzed data.

January 6-7, 1977--Reconvened subject matter specialists to assist in additional analysis and the selection of the field items to be used in the pilot test.

January 24, 1977--Selected random sample of schools for pilot testing.

January 31-February 1, 1977--Convened measurement specialists to examine test development to data and make specific suggestions for test development and testing procedures for the pilot testing.

February 4, 1977--Notified schools and invited them to participate during the month of April, 1977.

February 4-25, 1977--Printed BEST for pilot testing.

February 25-March 15, 1977--Mailed tests to participating schools along with form for securing recommendations from teachers and students.

March 15-April 15,1977--Local schools administer tests.

May 1-31, 1977--Score tests and analyze data and recommendations.

May 1-June 15, 1977--Report scores to local schools.

June 1-July 27, 1977--Prepare an analysis of test instrument and testing procedures for a report to the State Board with recommendations.

September 5-28, 1977--Provide a report to all local schools about the findings and the availability of the test for April, 1978.

Continuous--Conferences, meetings and programs for concerned citizens, teacher groups and others.

Spring,1978--BEST made available to all schools on a voluntary basis.

July 1, 1978--BEST required for all eighth grade students in the public schools. Testing done on a mandatory basis starting spring, 1979.

C. The Regional Conferences:

The State Department of Education held eleven regional educational conferences around the state during October and November, 1976 with the stated purpose to: "Discuss the topic of competency-based testing."

At each of these meetings staff members of the Department of Education made presentations about the development of Missouri's Basic Essential Skills Test (BEST), and participants discussed the pros and cons of the idea in small group sessions. The State Department stated that more than 3,000 citzens participated in the 11 regional conferences concerning such questions as: Is there a need for such a test?; What kind of test should it be?; In what grade should it be given?; Should the test be required for graduation?; Should special provisions be made for "special students"?. Participants also had the opportunity to discuss the actual objectives and to review sample questions in the areas of language arts/reading; mathematics, and government/economics. Surveying the participants at the conclusion of the meetings, 83% said that they "did favor the concept of a basic skills test"; 67% favored "requiring all schools to administer the test"; 67% favored "the initial administration of the test near the end of the eighth grade"; but only 21% favored "requiring a student to pass the test before permitting the student to graduate"; while 56% of the participants said "No" to the graduation requirement.

From interviews at the State Department of Education and with several local administrators who had attended these Regional Meetings, it would seem that these meetings were used to ratify decisions that were already made. Several people interviewed commented that their supposenly "vote of confidence" was taken after they were publically assured the vote only represented that the issue was worth "continued study."

One of the few vocal critics of the test within the Department of Education characterized the objectives in the BEST as being developed internally. People brought in as consultants were asked to react to objectives developed rather than to develop the objectives. He characterized the Regional Conferences as a public relation effort to sell the BEST.

D. State Board Action:

The State Board of Education used the results from the Regional Conferences to set policy at its November 18-19 meeting at Kansas City in 1976. The Board adopted the following amendment to the State Rules for Classification and Accreditation of Public School Districts:

> "Beginning with the 1978-79 school year, each school district shall administer the Basic Essential Skills Test (BEST) to all pupils in Grade 8 according to instructions provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In subsequent years, the test shall be administered annually to all pupils in Grade 8, and those pupils above Grade 8 who did not take or did not pass the test or any subtest previously (does not apply to pupils who were eighth graders

> prior to 1978-79). Pupils enrolled in special education classes may be exempt or given the test in a modified manner when specified in the Individualized Education Program (IEP)."

Local school boards had the responsibility, under the school classification and accrediation program, of maintaining appropriate records of the BEST results, and to record the passage or failure of pass on each students transcript. The State Board deferred action on the question of making passage of the examiniation a requirement for high school graduation.

After scoring the BEST at the state level through a contract with the University of Missouri, school districts received back the following:

(1.) An individual student adhesive backed label reporting scores in reading/language arts, mathematics, and government/economics. This label included the scores of locally scored objectives (2 copies per student);

(2.) An individual student profile each in reading/language arts, mathematics, and government/economics (3 copies per student);

(3.) A school district report of group performance for eighth-grade students (3 copies);

(4.) A building report for eighth-grade students if the school district requests it by placing header sheets in their request for scoring (3 copies);

(5.) A listing of all students in grades 8 & 9 who did not pass one or more BEST requirements (1 copy); and

(6.) A state report (at a later date, after reporting results to the State Board of Education).

(Memo, to Superintendents of Schools, from the Director of Pupil Personnel Services at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, May 8, 1979.)

E. Intent of the State in Adopting the BEST:

Through both published accounts and through interviewing people involved in developing the BEST, the intent of the state in developing the BEST is represented in the following quotes from administrators in the state department of education:

1. The State Superintendent in a written publication stated, "Even with the numerous and diverse educational goals in elementary and secondary schools, many of which were formerly achieved in the home, there is general agreement that certain basic skills and knowledge should be mastered before it can be said youth are ready to cope with adult life. More and more, society is demanding some assurance that all students graduating from public schools exhibit competency in applying basic skills....The Basic Essential Skills Test (BEST) was developed to assist schools in assuring that all students achieve these basic goals;"

2. The State Board of Education said that the aim of the BEST is, "Provide an objective measurement of each student's knowledge of certain basic information in

arithmetic, reading, government and economics, and the application of such knowledge to the solution of practical everyday problems."

Other comments of state level personnel about the intent of the BEST included:

3. "What we want is a minimum, which all kids perform at-- a floor;"

4. BEST is an "effort to call attention to skills most people are likely to need as citizens of our society;"

5. BEST seen as "one way to make schools get serious, if they have to take a test;"

6. The BEST has "forced school administrations to develop a budget based on educational needs;"

7. The BEST helps in the "monitoring of individual achievement to help remediate;"

BEST was to stress the application of basic academic skills to life situations. It was intended to serve as an instructional tool and screening device that will identify students' deficiencies while sufficient time is available to accomplish remediation. Importantly, the test would focus attention on those students who tended to "fall through the cracks" in schools.

The 39 state paper/pencil test objectives (13 in each sub-test of language arts, math, and government/economics) and the 10 locally scored objectives (8 in language arts and two in math) were all deemed important enough that while a student needed an overall passing score of 75%, at least one of the three items for each objective also had to be correctly answered in order to pass that sub-test.

The rationale for giving BEST in March is to allow time for data processing results before the end of the school year. Grade 8 is considered the appropriate time because it marks the end of formalized reading instruction in many schools; it allows adequate time for remediation in the final four years of schooling; and importantly, many students begin dropping out of school in the 9th grade, so that testing in the 8th grade ensures everyone will take the BEST.

F. State Implementation of the BEST:

The State Department of Education was motivated to initiate, develop, and implement a state minimum competency test at the 8th grade level based on the above concerns to assess and to assure a "floor" of knowledge and skills for public school graduates. The implementation of the BEST, however, raised several issues:

1. One of the outcomes of developing objectives around state determined areas of knowledge was that the test, in fact, was not based on curriculum in place in a majority of local districts. The stress in BEST objectives was on application of "life skills," a relatively new approach for many schools. This approach had more commonly been used with special education students, as compared to average or gifted students.

One state level respondent commented, "BEST was initiated not based on curriculum in place in local districts but rather what they thought students should know." Government, for example, is a content area which traditionally has been covered in 9th grade Civics; Economics usually is not formally covered in grades K-8.

Kansas City area educators admitted that they "taught eighth-grade mathematics and social studies courses out of sequence just to prepare for the state's mandatory minimum competency test and thus possibly jeopardized the students understanding of those subject areas." Educators complained that the government/economics subtest covered material not offered until ninth grade. According to the article, "School districts have altered their teaching methods for the test because of increasing public pressure to score higher and a desire to be sure students have learned the minimum skills set by the state." (Faye A. Silas, "Teachers See Danger in Focus on State Test," Kansas City Times, April 16, 1980, p. 1A)

The state made the decision not to re-evaluate the BEST objectives after five years as originally planned, because many districts had already changed their curriculum to match the state objectives. Thus, people at the state level decided that it was not fair to re-evaluate the objectives, even though they had second thoughts on some of them and would have like to have made some changes.

2. The state's help to local school districts as part of BEST implementation is limited. Within the Missouri Department of Education there are four professionals who are

familiar with the BEST program and devote 30-35% of their time to BEST activities. Most of the attention is on field-testing new BEST test items each year (though the number on the test remains constant).

Department curriculum specialists develop BEST activity books for use by local districts, and organize about 40 BEST workshops around the state for district and local school personnel. State personnel are not sure to what extent their materials are used at the local level, and in fact, get few calls for assistance from the local level. Some districts have taken advantage of available help; many have not.

3. The major area of state assistance, additional funding for remediation, has not been forthcoming. The budget of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is the source of funding for the BEST program. The total budget in 1976-77 was $54,000, for various committtee meetings and conferences called for developing the components of the BEST, printing booklets and answer sheets, scoring, and field-testing and reporting scores. Costs for 1977-78 totalled about $67,000 for field and pilot-testing, printing, scoring and reporting; 1978-79 (the first year of official BEST testing), about $110,500 was spent in program-related activities. (William Philip Gorth, "A Study of Minimum Competency Testing Programs," Report to N.I.E., 1979.)

The state has given no additional money for remediation in connection with the BEST, taking the position that these are the basics and districts should be doing this anyway and do not need extra money for doing what is their job. Money was asked for, but no extra money was given school districts to carry out the BEST. As one St. Louis School Board member put it, "If the legislature should proceed on the course of legislating mandatory testing, we feel that fiscal responsibilities need to be included in the mandate, providing funds above and beyond current levels, so local communities may be able to positively respond to the outcome of statewide mandatory assessments." (Donald I. Hammonds, "School Board Members Oppose State-ordered Tests for Diplomas," St. Louis Globe-Democrat, October 1979, p. 7A.)

In 1979 a House bill (HB835) was introduced, to develop and establish a remedial education and testing program; House bill (HB605) introduced in 1980, provided for the development and establishment of remedial education and testing programs in each school district in the state and provided for state aid for remedial education.None of these pieces of proposed legisltation passed, but they reminded the State Department of Education personnel of the continuing interest the legislature had in minimum competency testing.

The State Department of Education came out with a number of recommendations for local districts regarding the BEST, in June, 1982, including: "For a student who does not pass one or more of the subtests, the school district is obliged to design an educational program for the succeeding year which will assure that students master these simple basic skills. High schools should diagnose each student who fails a BEST subtest for the second time to determine the reason for the student's failure. In some cases it may be necessary to design a special program to help ensure that the student will master all skills prior to graduation." Thus, while remediation was initially a "local option", school districts four years later were told that it was a "responsibility," but without any financial inducements attached.

4. In order to pass the 10 locally evaluated objectives, the student must receive a "satisfactory" rating on each objective (8 in language arts and 2 in math). While performance standards for the 39 state-developed objectives are absolute in nature, the performance standards for the 10 locally administered objectives are determined by local criteria, and therefore, can vary greatly.

Students tend to perform less well on these 10 objectives than on the other 39 pencil and paper objectives. According to one state department curriculum specialist, the lower scores result from the fact that these objectives are based on teachers' judgements and teachers tend to be reluctant to score students as having "mastered" an item; they are concerned that they will be held accountable sometime in the future for "signing off" on that skill.

5. The test administration procedures, contained in a detailed 46-page GUIDE FOR THE BASIC ESSENTIAL SKILLS TEST prepared by the Department of Education, do not provide for any pretesting practice by students. Although, the local districts were encouraged to use the BEST data "for

individualized program planning," as the test scores became the focus of local concern, pretesting became an obvious response to better preparing students.

6. The issue of whether passage of BEST should be part of the graduation requirement was by-passed in 1978, with the State Board leaving the graduation requirement as a local option. A House bill (HB983), April 27, 1981, would have made the BEST a graduation requirement; this bill argued that the present state approach was weak because there was no penalty for seniors who failed the BEST. At this time, the State Department of Education spokesman lobbied against the bill, arguing: "The Bill...could increase Missouri's high school dropout rate and cause an outbreak of lawsuits filed by disgrunted parents against the state." Staff in the State Department were almost unanimous in their opposition to the graduation requirement in 1982, though, at that time, it was being seriouly considered at the state level; there was concern over the fact that 11.5% of the juniors in the state had still not passed the BEST. There also was a feeling at the state level that some school districts were not taking the BEST seriously, and the graduation requirement would put added teeth in the state mandate.

Some school districts used the local option to make the BEST a graduation requirement on their own. On June 24, 1983, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that 29 of the state's 456 school districts required passage of the BEST for high school graduation. (The BEST was made a graduation requirement in 1983 by the state, but was still a local option at the time of this research.)

G. Unintended Consequences of the BEST:

1. The Impact of the Media:

The major implementation issue facing the State Department of Education was their lose of control over local district test score data, and how it was used by the media. Staff in the Department of Education said that the BEST is the only test that they feel they have had negative consequences from, steming from the "public nature" of the BEST. It is also the only test which is state mandated, besides the passage of a civics test for high school graduation. No one collects or monitors that "local test," and no one fails to graduate because of it.

As part of the pilot testing for the BEST in 1976, the Department of Education staff had collected racial data. The test results showed blacks performing significantly worse than whites on the 15 test items, and the decision was made not to seek racial data in the 1978 voluntary taking of the BEST, nor in subsequent BEST tests. From previous experience with test data, staff also realized that the urban areas of the state would do the worst on the BEST and, thus, argued against putting the data in ways so that districts could be compared. While there were some early warnings against organizing test data in ways to allow districts to be compared, the legislature and the State Board wanted the data collected by district.

The results on a state-wide basis were that socio-economic differences between districts did show up. An article in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch concluded that in general, graduates of schools in the suburbs of Kansas City and St. Louis were better educated than those in inner-city or rural schools. High schools in the midst of prime agricultural land or in outstate college towns did better than those in less affluent rural areas. One school administrator in an affluent area of St. Louis County commented, "We have marked socio-economic differences in our district, too, which tend to show up in our test results." (Eric L. Zoeckler, "Many High School Seniors Test Low on Basics Tests, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, August 7, 1978, p. 1.)

The media picked up on the BEST immediately, according to Department staff. People at the state level feel that they were naive about the media, and the level of interest they would have in the test results. Because of the public nature of the data, newspapers were able to have access to it as soon as the Department of State received the results. They pulled out the results by districts, and ran comparisons of local districts with front page headlines.

The Department of Education had promised districts "volunteering" for the test in 1978 that the results would not be made public. It ended up that they could not keep their promise. A St. Louis Post-Dispatch article dated August 7, 1978 (p.1) notes, "The state officials who supervised the testing are reluctant to compare test scores.

They resisted requests by the Post-Dispatch for individual school test results until pressed by the newspaper under the state's Sunshine Law. Officials had promised the schools volunteering to take the test that their results would remain secret."

Other articles focused on the comparison in districts' test scores. (e.g.,Eric L. Zoeckler, "Test Results: Pupils Lacking in Skills Use," St. Louis Post- Dispatch, September 15, 1978, p. 1A. This article reviews Missouri students' performance on 1978 BEST and Commissioner Mallory's reaction.) Articles also appeared in the Columbia Daily Tribune, the Kansas City Times, the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, Hannibal Courier-Post, Jefferson City Post Tribune, North County Journal, the Washington Missourian, Washington Citizen, West County Journal, St. Louis Argus, and other smaller local newspapers. The publicity was wide-spread and substantial.

Basically, the Department of Education had no control over the media and the sensational play made over the test scores and how local districts compared against one another; however, they also were taken by surprise at the extent and depth of the coverage. The St. Louis and Kansas City metropolitan areas, in particular, were treated in much the same way as sports teams, with score cards showing how each "district's ratings" compared against other districts in the area. Each year the ratings came out, usually on the front pages of the newspapers, showing school districts' percentages passing by sub-test and total district scores.

Change data from the previous years indicate improvement or decline in district scores.

Media interviews with local superintendents of schools accompanied the test results, asking them their reactions to how their own districts did and comments about the standings of other districts. From 1977 to 1983, we found 248 articles on minimum competency tests and the BEST in the Missouri newspapers, concentrating on newspapers available in the St. Louis metropolitan area.

The State Superintendent of Schools in reacting to the publicity over the test scores commented in May, 1978, "There will probably be some tendency to compare school districts according to the results of the BEST, but the value of the test will be what it reveals about individual students and their command of basic skills." (St. Louis Post-Dispatch). In May, 1980, the Superintendent commented on the same issue, "The biggest drawback (of the BEST) is that it has prompted the comparison of school districts on the basis of the results...such comparisons, however, are inevitable--and in the final analysis, probably harmless." (Missouri Times).

One of the focal points of our analysis of the impact of the BEST at the local level, is the effect the "public nature" of the BEST had on the implementation of the testing mandate. The media made the BEST "visible" in a way that no other single test has been in the state; it is the one common denominator allowing comparisons among school districts.

A 1978 Post-Dispatch article, "Skills Test Marks Rattle Parents, School Officials," reports pressure on educators from parents for immediate improvement of their schools' BEST performance by using crash courses. According to the article, "Some parents even said that preparation would enhance property values because the districts would be considered good areas in which to live." The article goes on to say, "In some school districts, administrators were angered over publication of the district-by-district results, but this did not stop residents from complaining about their district's performance."

In another school district, the superintendent commented, "Anytime the state sets up a testing standard and the press believes that it should take up a quarter of the front page, it does create pressure on us." An official in a city district said, "The city schools did not rank high and we're catching H-E-Double-L for it."

In spite of improved BEST scores for many districts in 1979 relative to 1978, many Missouri educators and some legislators and school board members questioned whether minimum competency testing was the proper tool to judge students' progress. For many educators, the improved scores in 1979 did not necessarily mean the quality of education was improving, "A common concern is that the test is being 'taught' and thus proves very little." Other comments of school people included, "It (BEST) highlights the importance of evaluating the curriculum to see that objectives are taught. We did all that for the test. That's why students do well. That's why our students did well;" "We have to build a curriculum to equip the students with the proper skills to pass the test;" "The best thing about the test is that it has given schools the chance to look at curriculum."

Others commented, "It's like cramming for a final exam in college;" "If we end up teaching the test, what have we accomplished?" "The test is becoming so important that it's becoming the curriculum;" "Boards of Education are attempting to run school districts like corporations....If your students don't perform as well as other districts' students, your teachers will hear about it." (Deborah Wiethop, "Basic Essential Skills Test--What Does It Prove," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, June 13, 1979, p. 3-4.)

A superintendent in a St. Louis County suburban district summed up the expressed concerns of many school people in saying, "The BEST scores were just one measure of teaching effectiveness, but one that looms in the public mind because they are published."

2. Undue Pressures on School Districts and Teachers to Improve Scores:

The public comparisons of school district scores through the news media was, thus, one of the unintended consequences of the Missouri mandated minimum competency test. Another unintended consequence brought about through community pressure for high achievement was a series of cheating allegations and several court cases, with instances of teachers dismissed over providing students answers on the

BEST. Many of the school district personnel interviewed in this study would "suggest" how unusual it was for "a certain district to get 100% passing the BEST." Many school staff felt that districts responded to the test situation by "bending the rules" to look better.

One teacher, who was dismissed in a cheating scandel in a suburban district, argued that she was made the scapegoat for widespread irregularities in the administration of the 1981 BEST. The principal in another school district suggested that the press shared in the guilt caused by BEST cheating because the "scoreboard fashion" of reporting scores created undue pressure on school personnel. Other administrators complained about the obsession of some school administrators, who feel compelled to bring scores up "at any cost" to avoid bad publicity. (Claudia MacLachian and Maura Lerner, "Teacher Admits Giving Student Another's Answers," Post-Dispatch, July 1981; "BEST Pressures," Post-Dispatch, July 31, 1981; Bill Smith and Deborah Wiethop, "County Schools Report Higher Scores on Skills Test," St. Louis Globe-Democrat, April 1980, p. 6A.)

Alleged teacher cheating took place in various areas in the state. Major instances of "teacher cheating" were reported in the Kansas City school district and in University City, in St. Louis County. School people and officials in the teachers' unions, however, suggested that testing "irregulatities" were much more widespread than what was in fact reported in the newspapers. The Missouri National Educational Association (MNEA) President, referring to accusations of test score "adjustments" which she had received, commented, "Districts are putting more and more pressure on teachers to improve the scores. Anytime you have a statewide test, the public is led to believe this is the answer to educational ills. Of course, this will put pressure on the schools to improve their scores--often by any means."

A University of Missouri at Kansas City education professor commented that he was not surprised at the reports of cheating, "You have to expect it anytime teachers are put under that much pressure and also give the test. If teachers are going to be evaluated on the basis of test scores, someone else should be administering the tests." (Stephen E. Winn and Tammy Tierney, "Cheating on BEST Test is Alleged," Kansas City Star, April 20, 1980, pp. 1A & 3A; "Teacher Tells of Work Sheets Almost Identical to Skills Test," p. 3A.)

Some teachers also complained that much time was devoted to preparing for the BEST: "There were no surprises, we simply crammed for it. The kids were so used to the material they could have taken it in their sleep. But if you gave it to them tommorrow I doubt if half of them would pass." (Ibid.)

The school district in St. Louis County, which had the highest scores the first three years of the testing program, took the mandate seriously: "The word came down from the Board of Education and the Superintendent that 'We expect you to do well on the BEST test,'" commented the principal of the Junior High. The district's teachers and administrators ensured that all skills tested were emphasized in their curriculum. The district staff attended State Board of Education meetings, used publications designed to prepare schools and teachers for the BEST and gave students extra work in areas they knew were weak. The principal visited classes to explain the importance of doing well on the BEST. Some students even worked on their own initiative on areas of weaknesses. The article containing the above description, likened the post-BEST hallway scene to the "Dallas Cowboys' locker room after the Super Bowl". (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, September 24, 1978, p. 7A.)

The State Superintendent of Schools commented publically about charges of BEST cheating by saying, "The purpose of the test is not to check on the teachers--not to check up on any school district--It's to determine whether some minimal skills have been mastered by the student." (Colleen Cordes, "Test Scores Are Invalid if Teachers Cheated, Official Says," Kansas City Times, April 21, 1980.)

In another article, State Education officials emphasized, "Test results are not designed to be compared between school districts. They provide districts and the state with comprehensive information on how well students have mastered basic skills." (Faye A. Silas, "Eighth-grade Test Results Decline in Some Districts," Kansas City Times, April 11, 1980, p. B-1).

H. Summary:

The state of Missouri wanted the BEST to be a useful tool for school districts to keep students from "falling through the cracks" of public education, and to insure that students had the basic skills and knowledge to be informed citizens by the time they graduated from high school. In the process of implementing the BEST at the local level, the visibility of the test score results in the media and the accompanying pressures on school districts to be "competitive" with surrounding school districts, represented "unintended consequences" of the testing mandate. In the following chapters on the Missouri school districts, we will look in-depth at these impacts of the BEST on local school practices.

IV. SELECTION OF MISSOURI DISTRICTS:

A. Introduction:

The motivation to develop the Basic Essential Skills Test (BEST) by the State Board and State Superintendent of Education was based on considerations which mirrored national concerns in 1975-1976 that students were not learning basic competencies and were graduating from high school without the skills they needed to be informed citizens. The eighth-grade BEST was seen as an appropriate way to bring focus to these issues; to get local schools to review their curricula in terms of the BEST's 49 educational objectives and to screen students to insure that they were receiving the help they needed.

The newspaper accounts indicate vividly that the state-mandated test program did in fact focus attention on the issue of minimum competencies. There were, however, several unanticipated consequences from the implementation of the BEST, including: (1) the extent and focus of newspaper coverage of test results, comparing of school districts in ways similar to the reporting of baseball league team standings; (2) cheating allegations, resulting in several court cases; and (3) overall judgements of the community's "quality of education," based on reported test score rankings, to the extent of affecting the selling of local real estate.

In focussing upon the district level we wanted to look in-depth at the impact of the BEST on local school policy decisions and practices i.e., decision-making concerning the test and who participated; whether the testing program led to changes in educational goals of the schools; whether the implementation of the testing program altered the ways in which money and other resources were allocated; how the program affected the attitudes and behavior of teachers; and the impact of the publicity about school performances on both school people and community leaders involved with the schools.

The research concentrated on the following four issue areas:

(1.) The extent to which the need to implement the state testing mandate led to changes in how, where, and by whom the basic curriculum decisions were made?

---Is the course content made more standard throughout the school system?

---Are basic curriculum and text book decisions made by different persons as a result of the test?

---Are individual classroom teachers given less freedom over the content of their courses and how they spend their classroom time?

(2.) How was the curricula in the district adapted as a response to the BEST?

---changes in overall goals, philosophy, rationals?

---changes in course offerings?

---changes in sequencing of courses?

---changes in content of courses?

(3.) The extent to which allocation and distribution of budgetary and personnel resources have been a response to the testing mandate?

---changes which re-allocate more money to areas covered by the BEST?

---Increase in personnel in areas covered by BEST, e.g., new courses, remediation, in-service training, etc.?

(4.) District policy, Behavioral responses, and Teacher evaluations

---How does the school district define the purpose of the BEST?

---How much time is spent specifically on test-related material as district policy?

---How much time is spent on specific test preparation such as practice tests or exercises in class?

---Is part of the written school district policy to increase student test scores?

---Are teachers evaluated according to how well their pupils perform on the BEST?

---How does the school district evaluate the impact of the BEST on their schools?

---What are the benefits to the school district derived from the BEST?

---How do administrators use the test results?

---How do teachers use the test data?

With these areas of questions in mind we approached three (3) school districts, representing two counties, concerning their participation in this exploratory study.

B. Selection Of School Districts:

Given the limitations on the number of school districts we could reasonably study, the decision was made to select two districts in the same metropolitan area and one in an adjacent county. Much of the newspaper comparisons of school districts were in the metropolitan areas of the state. Thus, at least two of these districts had to deal with the visibility and publicity issue. Choosing a school district where the media attention was not as great, provided one type of comparison.

We also assumed that racial composition, financial support for education, size and whether school enrollment was increasing or declining, and the percentage of students passing the BEST, might all be important variables affecting how districts reponded to the testing mandate.

Districts were therefore ranked by: (1) Financial support for education (Assessed Evaluation Per Pupil). (2)

BEST scores from 1979 through 1982, showing changes in the percentage passing. This change was also reflected state-wide, with the BEST scores between 1979 and 1982 increasing. (3) 1978 and 1980 racial percentages showing increases and decreases in district racial percentages and the percentage change. Districts also were ranked as being Low (under 5% black school population), Medium (between 5 and 25% black population), Medium High (between 26 and 49% black population), and High (50% and over black population). The average black population in St. Louis County public schools in 1980 was 22.33%.

We wanted representation of districts with both high and low support for education as represented by the Assessed Evaluation Per Pupil ranks. We wanted a district which scored relatively well on the BEST and one that scored in the lower third of the county; we were also interested in school districts that had significantly improved their percentage passing between 1979 and 1982 (at or above the county average). We wanted districts which had black student populations which were both lower and higher than the average in the county. We also were interested in having a district with two middle or junior high schools in order to examine the possible competition between schools within the same district, given that the focus of attention was on the BEST at the 8th grade level. In other words, we wanted school districts which would represent many of the key characteristics of suburban school districts in urban metropolitan areas.

The choice of the third school district was defined as a rural area, and one which would represent more of a small town comparison. We looked at the same variables in a number of districts within fifty mile drive of the other two districts chosen: financial support for education; racial composition; test scores; and size.

The selection of the three school districts was made with these various variables in mind. After our initial selection we made contact with the superintentdents in each district to request their participation. Two of the three initial choices agreed to participate. The suprintendent in the third district refused, but allowed himself to be interviewed and provided an interesting explanation for his refusal. He indicated that the staff in his school district had made major changes in the curricula and in sequencing of course materials because of the BEST. They had, however, acted outside of the knowledge of their school board, which had told them not to be influenced by the test. The superintendent did not want his district studied because he did not want his school board to know what they had in fact done internally to respond to the BEST.

Our alternate choice for the third district agreed to participate in the study. This district was comparable to the district which refused, so we felt that there was no disadvantage in making the change. In fact, this alternate choice had already made the policy decision to make the BEST part of their high school graduation requirement, and so added an important variable to the study.

C. Characteristics of the School Districts:

The three local school district chosen ranged in their enrollment, organizational structure, assessed evaluation per pupil, their percentage of black school-age population, the percentage of students who persist to graduation, and their scores on the BEST. Below is a table comparing the three districts along these variables.

	DISTRICT 1.	DISTRICT 2.	DISTRICT 3.
Eligible Pupils:	4,659	5,324	2,700
E/P/P:	$2,508	$1,929	$1,862
Assessed Val. E/P:	$63,077	$34,427	$49,994
Total Levy:	4.89	4.91	3.35
Grade Structure:	K-5,6-8,9-12	K-6,7-8,9-12	K-6,7-9,10-12
No. of Schools Involved (8th grade level:	2	1	1

Percentage of High School Graduates:	72.4%	58.1%	84.1%
BEST as a Graduation Requirement:	No	Yes	No
% Minority Population (1980):	16.6%	38.3%	---
State Scored Part of BEST:			
% Passing BEST (1979):	76.3%	60.8%	72.2%
% Passing BEST 1980:	83.5%	47.9%	56.2%
% Passing BEST 1981:	92.8%	65.9%	64.2%
% Passing BEST 1982:	93.9%	76.2%	80.1%
% Passing BEST 1983:	98.0%	74.1%	74.9%

In District #1, from 1979-1983, the reported BEST scores consistently improved, showing 21.7% increase in the five years. In District #2, the test scores flucuated, with an over-all increase of 13.3%. In District #3, from 1979-1983, the test scores fluctuated, with an over-all increase of 2.7%.

How the individual school districts responded to the state mandated BEST, and the consequences and perceptions of impact of the BEST on school practices for each of the three school districts in Missouri will now be examined.

V. GARDENWAY SCHOOL DISTRICT

A. Community Context:

Gardenway is an old community, which developed independently of the close-by large city, but is now a suburb in the metropolitan area. As in the rest of Missouri, Gardenway schools were legally segregated until 1954. The community began the desegregation process shortly after the Supreme Court decision. An old established black community was contained within the school district boundaries. A 1975 desegregation order to further desegregation, along with declining enrollments (from 11,000 to 4,500 students), led to the closing of schools and the restructuring of the grade levels in the 1977-78 school year. Students were consolidated into fewer buildings at the lower grades, middle schools were developed, and desegregation was furthered.

Desegregation had been a legal issue in the metropolitan area since the early 1960's with public accommodations, open occupancy and "block busting" major issues. At the time of this research, Gardenway school district was involved in a metropolitan school desegregation case, with 24 other school districts. A "voluntary" desegregation plan already in place encouraged some inter-district mobility of black youngsters to suburban districts and in-mobility of white youngsters to the majority-black urban school district.

B. School Context:

The school system, which moved from a junior high to a middle school structure (K-5, 6-8, 9-12) in the 1977-78 school year, has two middle schools where the BEST is given to 8th grade students. There are 12 teachers who teach subjects covering BEST objectives in the 8th grade; 6 teachers in each of the two middle schools, 2 in language arts, 2 in math, and 2 in social studies. At the high school one resource teacher handles students not passing the BEST. There is a tutorial format in the high school to help students still needing to pass the BEST. All of these teachers involved in implementing the BEST were interviewed individually about the test and its impact.

The district made a commitment to competency-based education in 1978 in the hiring of a new superintendent and the development of a program called Project Excellence. Project Excellence did not result from the BEST. It reflected community concern with competency education, something that paralleled the BEST. When the middle schools were organized, Gardenway also instituted the Extended Basic Skills (EBS) classes for seventh and eighth grade students, except for those in the gifted or in the Chapter 1. programs. These EBS classes were set up to provide individualized and small group instruction (14-15 students in a class; half the regular class size), in a review period and as a time to bolster basic skills. The EBS classes were to provide teachers contact time with students to focus on areas of student weaknesses. Chapter 1. students had remedial classes and gifted students were put in a program called PACE, both scheduled at the times as the EBS classes.

C. Administration/Implementation of the BEST:

In 1978 when school districts across the state were asked to "volunteer" to give the BEST to their 8th graders, Gardenway volunteered along with most other districts. Only the state's paper and pencil objectives were given in 1978, not the 10 locally scored items. The test was given in Gardenway without any special preparation. A memorandum from the central office regarding the BEST (dated November 15, 1977), indicated that Gardenway would be participating in the BEST on a voluntary basis. It acknowledged that the state test could have some influence on the district's curriculum: "Should deficiencies be identified in grade 8 and those deficiencies remain at grade 12, it would be clear that some consideration should be given to program adaptations between grades 8 and 12."

The district, as other school districts, had been reassured by the state that the test results would not be made public. The resulting 1978 BEST scores, with under 80% of the students passing, were seen as a "big disappointment and surprise," according to a school administrator. The ensuing newspaper coverage of all of the 8th grade test results of school districts in the county had a "big effect on the reaction in the school district." People in the community were unhappy with their comparative test score results. As the superintendent expressed it, "Once the box scores were published, our pride was on the line." It pushed the district to make an effort on the BEST. In 1979, the district began using the state developed materials in the subjects covered by BEST (mathematics, government/economics, and reading). BEST test objectives were incorporated into the district's curriculum, Project Excellence. Handbooks for Project Excellence were developed in Social Studies, Reading, and Math for the 6th to 8th graders in 1981. In 1982, the district developed other materials in conjunction with the BEST, to provide test preparation materials: Government/Economics Extended Basic Skills Practice Pages; Mathematics Extended Basic Skills Practice Pages; Language-Arts Extended Basic Skills Practice Pages.

Other written communications also indicate the importance the district began placing on the test after it became mandatory in 1979. Communication from the superintendent's office addressed to "Dear Parents," regarding the results of the BEST states, "These results will be used to help review curricula in areas tested by the BEST. We will also evaluate each student's results to determine strengths and weaknesses, and plan needed learning activities for each student....The attached comparison with the last BEST results indicate that we have made significant improvement. Further curriculum modification will be considered which will undoubtedly mean improved performance in future years." Meetings were also scheduled at the two middle schools to explain individual performance scores to interested parents.

A Memorandum (dated February 26, 1982) from a middle school principal to eighth grade team teachers regarding the BEST and addressed to "Dear Students," encouraged students to do "their very best on this test". It also commented: "The results of our school will be compared to other schools...and ranked in the Post and the Globe. (The two daily newspapers) Therefore an additional incentive should be that our school ranks right up at the top of the list."

Communications also came from the high school encouraging students to take advantage of tutorial help in connection with passing the BEST. A letter dated January 17, 1983, and addressed to "Dear Parents," was sent to parents whose child either had never been given the BEST or took the test but did not pass. The letter dealt with an after school tutorial during the end of January through the end of February. Tutorials were scheduled in all three academic areas covered by the BEST.

After the initial lower than expected showing on the BEST, school administrators took seriously the importance of raising test scores. From interviews with both administrators and school board members/citizens active in the schools, it is obvious that this emphasis was done with the approval of the community.

1. Attitude of the Administration:

There is agreement amongst all the school administrators interviewed that the publication of the test scores had a strong impact on the school district. It made administrators more concerned about student attainment of cognitive skills. The superintendent explained that there was concern for minimum basic skills in Gardenway before Project Excellence or the BEST. He was hired because the school board wanted two things they felt he could provide: (1) The quality of the curriculum translated into positive student achievement and evidence thereof; (2) A performance-based evaluation.

The superintendent came in the spring of 1978; Project Excellence was begun in the fall. He did not know about the BEST until he became superintendent, so it was a "total surprise". Once the test scores became public, the superintendent felt that the district had to make an effort to raise the district's standing. The superintendent commented that the local community does evaluate the school district on the basis of student performance on the BEST and the SAT tests. The SAT scores are also published, but that is an achievement test rather than a minimum competency test with a set floor for passage.

There is generally negative feelings about the public nature of the test scores and individual districts' rankings appearing in the newspaper. One example cited by a school administrator concerning the publication of district rankings on the BEST, indicated what he saw as the media's distortion of the test: "A year ago everybody's scores were up and there was only a tiny box at the back of the newspaper; this year, a few were down, so it was front page news." With all the attention on the BEST scores, the reaction of administrators was that kids will start scoring well, but that won't necessarily mean that education is any better.

The district's instructional management system, Project Excellence, is seen by administrators as being more extensive and generally preferable to the BEST, which just deals with "minimum competencies". The plan is for Project Excellence to eventually expand to all subjects, K-12. The emphasis on the BEST test has meant, however, that Project Excellence has begun with the subjects covered on the BEST test. The BEST objectives have been incorporated into Project Excellence, which has thus led to considerable standardization of the curriculum. One administrator commented that the BEST has not led to more centralized curriculum decision-making, "The BEST just gave the curriculum more focus."

2. Implementation of the BEST at the Two Middle Schools:

One of the issues we were interested in exploring in this study was the potential for intra-district competition in the implementation of the BEST. Although the test is set up so that students not passing one or more of the sub-tests in the 8th grade have to re-take that part the following year and every year until they either pass it or graduate from high school, the 8th grade scores are the only ones reported in the newspaper. The public focuses on the test only at the 8th grade level. The effect of this attention is that the most pressure surrounding the test takes place at the 8th grade. We were interested in seeing whether a school district with two school sites containing an eighth grade would compete in the BEST as they might with their sports or music programs.

The answer to this question in Gardenway is that there is not direct competition between schools and that the central office administration did not use test scores to compare schools. There was, however, a difference in the way the test was implemented at each of the middle schools and an acknowledged comparison at the building level. While the building administrators indicated that the two middle schools were grouped together when the test results were made public, the administrators are given the information on how their own school performs and are aware of which of the two middle schools has "come in first".

Preparation for the BEST was extensive at both of the middle schools, but more so at one. The process of preparation for the BEST had increased over the 5 years that it has been mandated by the state: after the first year, test preparation was handled in regular classroom instruction, with some push at the end of January with pre-testing. One school then began pre-post testing in preparation for the BEST in December, and now starts in September. The principal's reaction to the test is that "I'm accountable for it". But, he sees the real pressure of accountability on the teachers. It is, according to him, the most significant accountability these teachers will ever have. "We make a big deal out of it. There is a tremendous pressure on kids....There are tears in teachers' eyes when they come in if students are not doing well enough. We don't accept a certain percentage of students failing."

The first pre-test screens students and identifies those who might have difficulty passing the BEST. Depending upon those test results and teacher recommendations, students are put into remedial and tutorial arrangements, even using regular teaching time if needed. Even the "gifted" students in the PACE classes must take two pre-BEST tests.

Preparation for the BEST takes place primarily through the Extended Basic Skills (EBS) classes for regular students. (Pre-testing for students in the gifted program take place in the PACE classes and those in Chapter 1 in the remedial classes.) The EBS classes were originally defined as individualized instruction. As one administrator put it, "It was obvious to us that we needed to use this EBS time to better prepare students for the BEST." Using EBS for the BEST has meant that it has become direct group instruction for the BEST, not instruction based on individual needs. In the EBS classes they now have a unit on consumer math and one on reading the newspaper (want ads, etc.), which correspond to BEST objectives. The social studies part of the test gets handled more through regular classes.

Special education students usually take the BEST, based on their I.E.P. (Individual Education Plan). These students administrator added, "anything to motivate students for passage of the BEST." Thus, from September though the first week in March, when the BEST is administered, the school is involved with teaching the BEST.

The extensive preparation for the BEST is an outgrowth of the strong negative reactions from the Gardenway School Board after the first public reporting of the BEST scores in 1978. They were "shocked that we didn't do better...my God, how can this be," quoted one administator. While the school board was unhappy with the test results in 1978, they felt "our kids have basic skills. What was obvious was that our kids were not prepared to take the BEST." The pre-post testing preparation was initiated, and units on government/economics, which were not sufficiently reflected in the 8th grade social studies curriculum, were added.

3. Implementation at the High school:

The BEST is less visible at the high school, and therefore, there is less pressure on administrators and teachers. The decision not to make the BEST a high school graduation requirement lessened the pressure at the high school level. In the 9th through 12th grades, students are taken out of classes for administration of the BEST.

There are four counselors at the high school, and a resource teacher who was hired, in part, to help students who had failed the BEST in the 8th grade. The resource teacher provides voluntary tutorial sessions for those who have not passed the BEST by the 9th grade. During the month of February, there are daily tutorial sessions from 2:35 to

3:00 after school. Communications are sent to the parents about these sessions and individual counselors encourage students who need to pass the BEST to attend. Around 20 students were attending tutorial sessions in 1982-83; only 5 students came when the sessions were first started. The largest nucleus of students come for the government/economics tutorials. There is a daily bulletin which reminds students which materials are being covered in the tutorials. While students are encouraged to attend, it is not mandatory, so attendance fluctuates.

In 1983, 98% of the 8th graders were reported passing the pencil and paper part of the BEST. At the high school level, however, 45% of the 10th and 11th graders who took the BEST in 1983 did not pass the math sub-test; 12% the language-arts part; and 18-20% the government/economics sub-test. A high school administrator admitted that if the scores were published in the newspaper at the ninth, tenth and eleventh grade levels he would take the BEST seriously because "I would be ordered to".

4. Locally-Scored Objectives:

The locally graded objectives, 8 in language arts and 2 in math, are handled in both 7th and 8th grades. There are cards on each student, with the 10 objectives to be checked off by different teachers in various classes during the 7th and 8th grades. In 7th grade there is a mandatory one semester course called "Developmental Reading," which alternates with gym and all students take. Some of the language arts objectives are covered in that course. In the

8th grade there is an elective, which draws the lower ability students. At the high school level, the local objectives not passed are to be scored by the end of the 2nd quarter in December.

The guidance counselors see the BEST consuming an enormous amount of time with the local objectives. In the first year or two of the testing mandate, there was extensive record keeping, including the time involved in developing the tests for the local objectives. Gardenway was "gunshy," is how one counselor put it in referring to the fact that teachers were cautious about signing off on students' passing the local objectives. Teachers took it seriously, since their names were on the students' cards, and the accountability factor was a concern. Thus, "minimum" competency often was judged at a higher level of expectation, with the results that a greater percentage of students passed the state's paper and pencil part of the test, as compared to the local objectives.

5. Reporting Procedures:

Administrators in the middle schools see the BEST strictly as an accountability measure. They get the scores around Spring vacation. They notify teachers and students on their individual scores by class, and hold a public meeting on the interpretation of grade sheets for interested parents.

An annual report is made to the school board on the BEST test results. The two middle schools are grouped together publically in their scores. Middle school administrators know how their buildings tested, and school board members can get the information if requested. There is subtle competition between the two middle schools, though they share some teachers. Administrators from both schools feel a lot of pressure from the school board on the BEST scores, less from the central office. Because of the high expectations, administrators get questions from school board members if their scores (now in the high 90's) fall even a couple of percentage points. Two years ago, one of the school board's goals was to raise the BEST score from 96% to 98% passing. All of the administrators interviewed feel that they would be "in trouble" if test scores fell below the 90th percentile; some would put that at 95%. As one administrator put it: "The politics of it (BEST) is to get a high score." She commented that the school board does not realize what gets bumped in the curriculum or what goes into getting such a high score.

6. The Use of Student Test Scores:

When asked which of the following had been the single most important purpose served by the BEST in their district (i.e., as a tool for evaluating and improving the curriculum; as a tool for diagnosing and remediating the problems of individual students; as a tool for evaluating the performance of the local schools and holding them accountable), the most frequent response of those interviewed, was to see the BEST as an "Accountability Measure". Most of the school people interviewed in Gardenway did not see the BEST as an important diagonistic tool for the district. Remediation was limited to only those subjects covered by the BEST and only "before" the official test was given. The BEST test data was not used for remediation purposes. In referring to the BEST, one of the middle school administrators said, "It's very little use...it's very little value to us." He defined the problem as the format of the test data, which did not provide an "Item Analysis". The school district provides an item analysis of their own pre-tests, and thus are able to look at the curriculum based on their own test results.

Diagonsis and remediaton efforts are extensive before the students take the BEST in March, as part of the preparation effort for the test. There is no required remediation for students failing one or more of the sub-tests at the 8th grade level. (Tutorial sessions are available, but are not mandatory in the high school, and are only for purposes of preparing students who need to take the BEST again.)

Gardenway counselors do make sure that Chapter 1. teachers and EBS teachers are aware of how their students did on the pre-test and which objectives were weak. A printout lists the student with their performance on individual objectives. Teachers then use this data to work with individual students or with the whole EBS group if they were all weak in certain areas. A student with weaknesses only in math, for example, might spend two EBS quarters in math rather than one quarter in math and one in language arts. If students are pre-testing well by January and have been cycled through all areas of the BEST, then the EBS period is a study hall for them.

The EBS class is a time period to concentrate on those students who based, on their pre-tests, will not do well enough to pass the BEST in March. The staff's attitude is "Let's get them to pass the test." After the test is taken, teachers do not look at the test results to see where weaknesses might still be. The BEST, therefore, provides no relevant information for teachers on individual students, it only verifies information they already have, reported one counselor.

Thus, the test itself does not serve for diagnosis nor remediation purposes. BEST test scores are not looked at by teachers. One counselor reported that she remembers only one teacher who wanted to see any student's BEST scores last year; no teacher has asked this year. The BEST is not used for counseling or placement purposes. High school schedules have already been made out when the scores come out. The goal is to pass the test, not to use the results of the test for educational purposes.

D. Impact of the BEST in the Gardenway School District:

1. Impact on Curriculum.

a. Perceptions of Department Chairs, the Superintendent, and Teachers.

We looked at the impact of the BEST on the curriculum in several different ways. In interviews with administrators and teachers, specific questions were asked concerning the possible effect of the BEST on the curriculum. In addition, each department chair, at both the middle and the high schools, was asked to complete a survey listing the BEST objectives in his subject area and the grades over which he had responsibility (i.e., 6 to 8 or 9 to 12). They were to complete the following information for each BEST objective for the school years 1977-78 and for 1982-83: (1) Whether the objective was included in the curriculum in each of the two years; (2) The amount of time alloted to each objective; (3) Whether it was a separate unit; and, (4) Whether there was a positional shift of that objective within the curriculum.

Results from the Department Chairs, both on the forms themselves and in notes written to summarize the information, show much more curriculum change at the middle school than at the high school. The information on the high school curriculum indicate the following: The reading/language arts curriculum has not changed at the high school level; the math curriculum also has not been changed; several positional shifts have been announced in the government/economics curriculum for 1984. Objectives to be shifted were: (1) understand the term "democracy;" (2) understand the process of making, enforcing, and interpreting law in the United States; (3) understand and be able to apply basic information about how the government functions in the U.S. economy. Currently most of the BEST objectives appear within the curriculum in the 9th grade civics course, but several are covered also in the 11th or 12th grades.

The middle school now reflects the government objectives of the BEST as part of the American History curriculum, in the section on studying the Constitution of the United States. As part of better relating the curriculum to the BEST ojbectives, a section on "passing laws" was added to the 8th grade social studies, along with economic concepts. These new units and concepts cover a period of three weeks, one period (49 minutes) per day. The economics objectives have been put into the Extended Basic Skills classes. In this class students spend two class periods on each of the economic objectives in the BEST. Students also spend one class period on the government objectives in the EBS CLASSES. The amount of time and emphasis indicate that at the 8th grade level there is more time spent on material related to the government/economics objetives of the BEST in 1982-83 than in the 1977-78 school year. The introduction of the BEST has had a big impact on the 8th grade social studies curriculum.

In math at the 6th through 8th grades, the primary difference between 1977-78 and 1982-83 is the greater emphasis on problem solving materials, particularly word problems. A unit on "Consumer Math" was added at the 6th grade level, with an emphasis on word problems. The math chair commented that, "We do it at all three grade levels (6th, 7th and 8th), but the greatest amount of time and effort is spent at the 8th grade. This increase in time on word problems is not an isolated unit but is included in all the regular units of study." In addition the sequencing of seven of the math objectives have been altered within the curriculum. All these changes are in the 8th grade to make sure the BEST objectives are covered before the test is given in March. Generally, there is more time spent on math BEST objectives in the curriculum during the 1982-83 school year than in 1977-78, with the greatest amount of additional time on BEST related objectives occuring in the 8th grade.

In reading/language arts, the comments of department chairs were that the same objectives exist in both school years. However, the district now has an added period devoted to the BEST objectives, covering materials which previously had been found most in developmental reading.

Both the noted changes in curriculum statements and the testimony of the department chairs suggest that the BEST had had an impact on the middle school curriculum. The Gardenway superintendent stated in our interview with him that the BEST's impact has been on the curriculum more than anywhere else.

Of the twenty teachers interviewed in Gardenway, 13 or

65%, reported seeing the greatest impact of the BEST as being on the curriculum. When asked in the interview about whether the test had had an impact on the curriculum, 76% of the teachers responded that there had been a "big impact" or "an impact." However, when asked about the type of impact, only 10% responded that the BEST impact on the curriculum had been "positive".

b. Curriculum Review.

The impact of the BEST on the curriculum was also apparent in discussions of curriculum review. Gardenway conducts curriculum review every five to eight years in each of the four basic subject areas. One administrator commented that he did not think a recommendation for K-5 would be influenced by the BEST, decisions with respect to the 6-12 curriculum would be "very influenced" by the BEST. The 6-12 social studies committee was in the process of moving the citizenship course from the 9th to the 8th grade. There is a perceived need to incorporate BEST government and economics items more formally into the 7th and 8th grade courses. Several adminstrators expressed the feeling that the present curriculum arrangement is unfair to social studies teachers, since they have to incorporate part of the 9th grade curriculum pertaining to government/economics in order to prepare students for the BEST. One administrator stated the situation as follows: "BEST has had an informal influence on social studies. They didn't formally change the curriculum, but informally cover the material they need to in preparation for the BEST." At the time of the study administrators were discussing formalizing these practices with changes at the 7th and 8th grade levels.

There was some concern about the motivation and impact behind the proposed changes. It was clear that if the social studies curriculum is changed it will be solely because of the BEST. One administrator involved in the decision stated: "We are revising our curriculum to allow more time for government and economics, although not because we think it's wise ... We're in a competetive game now." Commenting on the rise in test scores he said, "We haven't taught kids better. . . We've changed our curriculum. We're teaching them different things. . . We've literally changed what we're teaching as a result of the BEST. Social studies is now economics with a little bit of law . . . We are setting our curriculum to meet BEST requirements." Most districts had nineth grade citizenship; now they have citizenship in the eighth grade, was the comment of one administrator.

Reactions to the focus on social studies varied. One administrator who deals with the social studies curriculum indicated that the, "The BEST has probably helped social studies." The fact that social studies was included as part of the BEST focussed attention on this area of study. On the other hand, another administrator complained that world history was getting slighted to accommodate the BEST influence. Commenting on the minimum attention being paid to Third World concerns in social studies, he said: "The things we probably need to do more with, we are going to do less with."

c. Centralization and Standardization of Curriculum.

Generally, the Gardenway district has undergone a greater centralization of the curriculum. Several respondents interviewed expressed the fact that the BEST clearly encourages standardization, providing teachers with less freedom of choice in how they deal with content.

There were, however, different perceptions as to whether the BEST was the sole cause of the trend toward standardization. Some administrators saw Project Excellence and the independent commitment the Gardenway school board had made to "teaching by objectives" as being more important to this trend than the BEST. The BEST had made the staff more aware of the curriculum and had the effect of putting more emphasis on practical applications. The impact on the curriculum was not the addition of new courses so much as altering existing courses to relate them more to the BEST objectives.

2. Impact on Teaching.

In the strucutured interviews teachers in Gardenway tended to view the BEST as having had a negative impact on their teaching. When asked about the impact on their own teaching, only one teacher responded that the impact had been positive. Perceptions of specifc changes in their courses caused by the BEST in areas such as content, sequencing of materials, allocation of class time, and the use of materials varied by subject area. Teachers were more likely to have introduced new supplementary materials than to change text books.

Twelve of the thirteen teachers interviewed at the middle school where there had been the most pressure with respect to test scores, agreed that "there is considerable pressure to teach for the test." A majority of the teachers interviewed at the other middle school agreed that there was much pressure. Likewise, 80% of the teachers interviewed agreed that "teachers here feel under great pressure to make sure their students do well on the test." On the whole the teachers saw the impact of the test on their teaching and their role as teachers as negative. The negative feelings were related to the level of pressure teachers felt about the BEST.

In response to questions concerning the impact of the BEST on teaching, administrators commented that their own Project Excellence would probably have been well into the second stage of higher thinking skills, if the BEST had not demanded so much attention be directed toward basic skills. Some administrators expressed the attitudes that the "floor" is going up, but that this is being done at the expense of critical skills which are going down. "The practice for the BEST bores the higher students stiff," commented one administrator. He went on to say, "Since there is intensive instruction to pass the test, they can't do other things."

The impact on teaching was described by some administrators as a shift to the needs of the much weaker students, with consequently less time spent on cognition and higher thinking skills. Teachers were divided on their assessment of whether the test had resulted in a shift in emphasis. A majority, 12 out of 20, disagreed with the statement that, "the use of the BEST has meant that we emphasize minimum educational achievement instead of other educational objetives in our curriculum."

3. Allocation of Resources.

According to the administration school resources have been diverted as a result of both Project Excellence and the BEST. Those resources include the allocation of time and effort to both programs. A lot of money had been diverted to Project Excellence and some money to the BEST.

Summer workshops were used to develop materials used to prepare students for the BEST, especially in the math area. The first year, eight staff worked for five days to develop materials for the BEST. The following three summers about half of that time was spent on the preparation of BEST materials. In dollar figures, the district paid a math teacher $250 for developing materials in 1979. In 1982 the district spent $2,042 to have eighth grade teachers write curriculum to help prepare students for the BEST. The general perception of administrators in the district was that any extra requests for purposes related to the BEST would be honored by the school board.

Teachers differed in the extent they saw the district spending a lot of money on the BEST. In the middle schools more of the teachers saw the district spending "a lot" rather than "a little" money on the test.

4. The Test and the Public.

None of the administrators interviewed in Gardenway was enthusiastic, nor really supportive, of the BEST. Some were more critical than others. On the positive side administrators mentioned the focus on the curriculum and heightened awareness about basic competencies. Greater emphasis on practical applications and the provision of a "floor" below which no student should fall were also noted. On the other hand, none of the administrators interviewed would choose to keep the BEST if it were no longer required by the state. None of them wanted the BEST to be part of their high school graduation requirements.

The possibility of making the BEST part of the graduation requirements had been discussed by the school board in 1979. One school board member had proposed such a policy. When interviewed, this board member characterized the BEST as a "good ego-booster" for the district. It provided the schools with good public relations. The member was not particularly enthusiastic about the BEST itself -- "The test was so easy.". He was shocked that the initial results were so bad. He took the poor results as proof that they had to go back to the emphasis on those subjects covered by the BEST. "If a student can't pass this test after four or five tries, how can that student pass his regular classes? If a student consistently fails, he shouldn't graduate," was the feeling expressed by that board member. The school board member was not successful in getting the board to tie high school graduation to the passing of the BEST. He felt that the failure of both the

State Board and the Gardenway Board to require passage for high school graduation was based on political considerations. He felt that Gardenway board members were afraid they would not be re-elected if they made passing the BEST a requirement for graduation.

Comments of two other school board members reflect their unhapiness with the state mandated test, as well as the importance they put on high test scores. Citing the publicity over the test scores, one school board member commented: "anything the public perceives as criteria, we'd better perform well and do whatever it takes within the realm of ethical practices. We strive to be successful."

In a series of coffees with teachers school board members have pointed out that "there is concern (for the BEST scores) out there." There would be real problems if the scores would move down from the 1983 level of 98% passing to the earlier 76% passing. The general improvement of test scores had been a board goal. All three members interviewed indicated that they would be very unhappy if the test scores fell below the 90th percentile.

Some board members, unhappy as they were with the test, indicated they would favor keeping the test itself if it were no longer required by the state. One explanation advanced for this is the public's perception that it is a measure of quality. One board member argued that Gardenway should not be the first district to drop the test. He said: "The BEST is one piece of Gardenway's whole testing scheme. Let's leave it there until we revise the whole testing program. It is blown out of proportion, but as long as the perception is that public schools are doing a lousy job, we're going to have the BEST."

Citizens active in school affairs that we interviewed, noted the publicity and public relations aspects as key impacts of the BEST, along with changes in the curriculum. The three school board members and two P.T.A. members interviewed emphasized the public relations values of the test. Three other citizens interviewed were more negative about the test itself and the amount of time the schools spent in getting ready for the test. As far as the community representatives were concerned, the most positive consequences of the BEST are its public relations aspects and the increased support for the schools in the community. These comments came after there had been substantial improvement in student test scores.

5. Teacher Evaluations.

How do teachers see the impact of the BEST on their schools? Do those who teach in areas covered by the BEST at the eighth grade level feel evaluated by the performance of their students on the tests? Do they see the impact of the BEST as positive or negative? Fifteen of the 21 teachers interviewed (71%), felt that the impact of the BEST on their school was either "very negative" or "negative." The proportion of negative responses was higher in Gardenway than in any of the other districts used in the study.

Responses to the question of whether teachers felt judged by how well their students did on the BEST varied.

At the middle school with the greatest emphasis on test scores, 8 of the 13 teachers responded that they were "directly" or "indirectly" judged by student performances. Teachers at the other middle school were less likely to feel judged in this way.

80% of the teachers (17 of 21) reported that teachers in their school paid "a great deal" of attention to the performance of students on the BEST. 100% of the teachers at one middle school and 63% at the other felt that administrators in their school paid "a great deal" of attention to test scores. Teachers generally reported feeling that district administrators, school board members, and the community paid a good deal of attention to student performances on the BEST. In response to the question of whether the local community evaluated the job the local schools are doing by the performance of students on the BEST, 100% of the interviewed teachers at one middle school and 75% of those at the other middle school responded positively. The perception that teachers were being evaluated by the community on the basis of BEST scores was higher in Gardenway than in any other school district in the study.

Students were perceived to take the test seriously Several teachers commented that many students thought they needed to pass the test to graduate from high school, because of the amount of emphasis put on the test. When asked if they told students that passage was not required, teachers replied they had not and it was fine for students to believe this if it motivated them to pass the test. When teachers were asked if they would like to see the passing of the BEST required for high school graduation, all of them said,"no."

Almost 50% of the teachers felt the single most important purpose served by the BEST is, "A tool for evaluating the performance of the the locals schools and holding them accountable." This response is similar to that expressed by school administrators.

Teachers were asked if they ever used BEST score results to diagnose individual student weaknesses. 86% of the teachers replied that they had not. Teachers indicated that the major curriculum impact "on their classes" is in the preparation of students for the test. The BEST results were not used to evaluate classes or teaching in other ways.

Most of the teachers did not feel that they had been involved in determining the implementation of the BEST at their school. This was the predominant response among teachers in the Missouri districts. On the other hand, the majority of the teacher resondents did see themselves as well informed about the BEST.

With respect to unexpected impacts of the BEST in their district the amount of publicity was the most common factor cited by teachers. Most of the teachers who cited unexpected publicity thought that the impact of the publicity had been negative.

E. Summary and Conclusions.

The implementation of the BEST testing mandate had a significant impact in Gardenway. The impacts have resulted primarily from the efforts to raise test scores. There has been a major impact on the curriculum, especially in the social studies area. At the 8th grade level new units on law and economics have been inserted into the social studies curriculum. More word problems and applications have been developed in math, with some re-sequencing of the math curriculum. BEST objectives are handled more explicity now in language arts.

"Time on task" has been a major resource allocation with respect to BEST objectives in the 8th grade. The time spent in the EBS classes prior to the BEST administration is upon BEST preparation. Two or three pre-tests are given during the 8th grade to prepare students to pass the test. The middle schools gear up for the test, with a great deal of emphasis put on passing the test.

The BEST is seen as good public relations for the district, following the significant improvement in test scores. As one school board member put it, "The high scores convey the message that we care about our schools." The test scores provide "a good image for our district," reported another board member. It (the BEST) "gives teachers and students a chance to feel good about themselves; to have a feeling of doing something well." School administrators and teachers were divided on the impact of the publicity on test scores. There was a lack of consensus among school staff that the stress and pressure involved in being at the top with respect to test scores was worth the costs.

None of the teachers, administrators, or board members thought the BEST was a good test. They preferred their own Project Excellence to the BEST and resented that the attention on the BEST had diverted focus from their own program. Though some of the citizens and school board members favored keeping the BEST, at least for public relations purposes, none of the administrators would keep it if they did not have to. The superintendent commented that, "We would not keep the BEST. We all hate it."

The most significant question posed by the Gardenway experience is whether the extensive efforts put into raising test scores has been worth the cost. Over the last six years, the district was successful in raising test scores. As our description and analysis suggest, however, the costs in terms of resources, discontent among teachers, and diversion of attention from other programs, constituted high costs for those efforts.

VI. FRANKLIN SCHOOL DISTRICT

A. Community/School Context:

Franklin school district is located in a suburb of a large urban center, with a substantial black population. There has been much in-mobility from the city to this school district in recent years, as well as out-movement, resulting in a rapidly increasing black school-age population (38.3% black in 1980).

The school population has declined substantially over the last ten years. Enrollment went from 10,000 students in 1970 to 5,067 in 1983. The district closed a junior high school in 1982 because of declining enrollment. The grade structure had changed based on enrollment needs. In 1963, Franklin had gone to a junior high arrangement, with the building of the second junior high in 1962. The process was reversed in 1983, with the 9th grade going back into the high school and the older junior high closing, leaving one building containing the 7th and 8th grades.

One of the main issues for the Franklin school system is the transient nature of its population. Many of the students it is testing as part of the BEST, have moved only recently into the school district. Thus, they are testing students that they are not educating. The central office administration developed a chart to make this point. This chart (developed in 1981), indicates in a general way that students who had been in the Franklin district the longest time (since K through 3rd) did the best on the BEST as eighth graders; those in the school system since 4th through 6th grades did next best. Those in the system only since 7th or coming in at the 8th grade did the poorest on the test. Several administrators felt that their "changing clientele" (an increasingly black student population from the adjacent large urban school district), was a major factor in their low percentages passing the BEST.

Franklin ranked in the lower third of the school districts in the county, in % of 8th grade students passing the BEST. The language-arts sub-test of the BEST was the easiest for the Franklin students; math gave them the most difficulty. The BEST test scores in Franklin were described by the central office administrators as "good enough," as long as they stay near the state average of about 60%. The first year of the test on a "volunteer" basis, the district only scored in the lower 50%. With the exception of the low ranking in 1980, when the scores went down to 48% passing, the BEST 8th grade scores had stayed above 60% passing.

When asked about the community's reaction to the BEST and the test scores, the administrators interviewed described the community as "complacent" and "very apathetic". The pressure to raise the BEST scores was seen as coming from within the school administration, not from community pressure. School administrators characterized the Franklin community as having "little mass citizen participation". There was little citizen involvement in any school issues. There had been no PTA in any school since 1975 and few parent committees. There are presently parent groups called Mother Circles. A few examples of community interest included: The Committee on Discipline, which was cited as one of the few committees functioning and accomplishing anything. A couple of other issues which have generated active citizen interest are: school closings in 1975 (four schools were closed), and the smoking issue. The BEST test and the test score results did not generate citizen interest. The administrators reported no telephone calls from parents concerning test scores, even when they were extremely low in 1980. The administrators said that generally there is not much community pressure on the schools, and that there is a lack of citizen leadership in school involvement. As one administrator put it, "People in this district feel as long as their kid is doing O.K., you're not going to hear from them."

Franklin school district was unusual in that it had chosen to make the BEST part of the high school graduation requirement, effective as of the 1984-85 school year. There was only one other school district in the metropolitan area which had also chosen the graduation requirement. The motivation for Franklin making this choice was the sense that their students did not care about the BEST. According to the assistant superintendent: "Teachers wanted something with teeth in it." The 1985 graduating class will be the first to come under this requirement.

B. Administration/Implementation of the BEST:

1. Focus on the Eighth Grade:

In 1978 Franklin took the BEST on a voluntary basis to "see how well we'd do," according to the assistant superintendent. They did not go to the school board for permission. In 1979, the BEST became mandatory. The central office administrators gave teachers the State Activity Books and did review the curriculum from 1st grade up, to see where the basic skills corresponding to the BEST objectives were located in the curriculum.

The school district did nothing special about the BEST, except handing out the state materials in 1979 or 1980. When the scores dropped so low (48%) in 1980, and the daily newspapers ran the comparative rankings of school districts in the county showing Franklin as having the lowest scores -- with headlines to that effect -- the district administrators pushed to improve its ranking. Other school districts which Franklin tended to identify with, also were down in their scores in 1980, but not as low as Franklin and, importantly, there were no newspaper headlines pointing out the low scores.

An official memorandum (dated June 30, 1980), from the superintendent's office to the junior high administrators, language arts teachers, social studies teachers, mathematics teachers and counselors regarding the BEST, describes the reaction of the administration to the low 1980 test showing. The memo begins:

"The poor performance of our eighth grade students on the 1980 Basic Essential Skills Tests was a disappointment to all of us. This performance resulted in a Post Dispatch headline that cited (Franklin) as having the poorest percentage of eighth graders passing the tests of all the County Districts and, obviously, brought on some patron criticism."

The Assistant Superintendent indicated that he had met with social studies and math teachers and administrators to try to bring scores up and said that language arts teachers also will be involved in the procedures for improving scores on the BEST. The following factors were listed as contributing to low scores:

1. "We have relied too much on the State booklets for examples of questions on the specific objectives.

2. Many students failed because they really didn't care whether they passed or failed.

3. Many parents did not motivate their children to try their best on the tests.

4. It is alleged that some Districts are teaching to the tests.

5. We may have focused too much of our efforts on preparing the remedial students for the tests. There were students in the average and high groups who failed the tests.

6. If a student is absent on the day of one of the subtests and completes the other two, the computer will list the test he did not take as a failure.

7. The most difficult test, government/economics, is

given last when motivation for the testing is probably the lowest.

8. We may not have focused enough efforts on the transfer-in students."

The procedures for the school year 1980-81 were listed as follows:

1. "Facsimile tests will be provided in the areas of language arts, mathematics and social studies.

2. These tests will be given in September by the language arts, mathematics and social studies teachers to all eighth grade students.

3. Record keeping sheets will be provided that will record correct responses on each objective for each child.

4. Teachers will provide worksheets for students who miss two or more questions on a given objective. It will be assumed that students who satisfactorily answer 80% or more of the questions on a work sheet will be able to pass that objective on the actual BEST.

5. A month (changed from 'two weeks') before the spring testing on the BEST, all students will be retested with the facsimile tests.

6. Parents of those children who fail the tests under item 5., will receive information from the school explaining the weaknesses and enlisting their help.

7. BEST will be adminstered in this order: Government/Economics, Mathematics, Language Arts/Reading."

The last sentence of the Memorandum read: "This procedure should help our students to pass the Basic Essential Skills Tests."

The low test ranking of the school district in 1980, which was "broadcast" in the newspaper, had several effects on the implementation of the testing mandate. The central office administration in memorandums indicated major concern about the scores and initiated pre-tests to better prepare students for the BEST.

A Memorandum (dated September 22, 1981) to the Junior High Lanaguage-Arts, Math, and Social Studies teachers from the Assistant Superintendent (with copies going to the Junior High Administrators and Junior High Counselors), indicates that the pre-tests for the three areas of the BEST should be completed no later than October 16. The memo goes on to say, "Even with the 65.9 percent of students who passed all three tests in 1981, our District ranked on percentages near the bottom of the list of County districts. Patrons express concern when they read comparative data and often conclude that our experience on the BEST is the measure of education in the District. We can be relatively sure of the following: 1) BEST will continue to be used; 2) the newspapers will continue to have articles relating to the scores received by metropolitan districts; and 3) some of our patrons will continue to believe that our scores represent the measure of the total educational program. We aren't likely to make changes in the above factors; therefore, we should focus on improving basic skills as measured by the tests."

The memo goes on: "We have had a problem with some students taking the attitude that the tests weren't important. The Board, at the September 8th meeting (1981), approved our recommendation that passing the BEST be required for a high school diploma. This requirement becomes effective for 1985 graduates. Hopefully, this will add 'clout' and change some attitudes....Our goal for 1982 is to have more than 66 percent of our students pass all three tests." (76.2% of the students did, in fact, pass the BEST in 1982.)

A memo from the Assistant Superintendent (dated May 28, 1982) to the Junior High Language-Arts, Math, and Social Studies teachers, lists the percentage of 8th graders passing all three tests from the 1978 (optional year) through 1982. The importance of the media exposure is again pointed out: "Our eighth grade students in 1980, as most of you are aware, had the poorest passing percentage on the tests of all school districts in the County. We have made progress since those days of negative publicity...."

The 1983 administration of the BEST showed the following schedule:

August 15-- Order BEST from Missouri Testing & Evaluation Service

September 1--List names of students on BEST test sheets.

September 15--Testing application forms completed and returned to state for testing materials. BEST testing dates placed on both testing and school calendars.

February 1--List of students taking BEST prepared.

February 15--Parents, students, teachers notified
of upcoming BEST tests.

February 22-26--Shipment of BEST received and
accuracy of shipment checked.

February 26--Evaluation of student performance on
locally administered objectives completed
and recorded in school file;due by March 1.

March 3,4,5--BEST test given to 8th graders.

March 8-10--Test given to 9th graders (March 8); 10th
graders (March 9); 11th and 12th graders
(March 10).

March 16--BEST materials packaged and returned to Columbia
(U. of Mo.) for grading.

April 10--BEST analysis received from testing service.

April 15--Reports of individual student BEST
results sent to parents.

June--First Board Meeting of Month: Report on BEST;
results prepared for local School Board.

June 1--Press Release on BEST results.

While the central office and building level administrators indicated that they did not feel any community pressure concerning the BEST or the district's scores, these administrators communicated "community" concerns to the junior high teachers, teaching in areas covered by the BEST. The junior high principal reported that some teachers even chose not to teach the 8th grade because of the BEST. "Some teachers request 7th grade classes to not teach the 8th grade BEST. It's a pain." While there were not indications that the community was putting major pressure on the school system or the teachers, the administrators were. The central office conveyed concern about the test scores in memos to the staff. The principal commented that he had received no telephone calls from the public on the BEST test scores; that teachers care more than the public does. He added, "My fear is teachers will think we want them to teach to the test." The principal did acknowledge though that, "The public looks at that kind of thing (test results) and says I'm glad I'm in that district (one with high scores)."

2. Administration of the BEST at the High School:

Most of the focus on the BEST in Franklin, as in other school districts looked at in Missouri, was at the 8th grade level because of the public nature of the test scores. Test score results for the 9th through the 12th graders never appeared in the media; the comparative rankings of school districts only took place at the 8th grade level. Franklin was one of the few school districts in the entire metropolitan area choosing to make the BEST part of its graduation requirements, before the state mandated it. Once this decision was made in 1981, to go into effect the 1984-85 school year, did it affect how the test was administrated and implemented at the high school (9th through 12th grade)? At the time of the interviews, the sophmore class was the first to be affected by the new high school graduation requirement.

The counselors handle the BEST at the high school, taking students out to test them in the cafeteria. Teachers were not really involved with the test, although the principal of the high school said that he tries to let teachers know in the beginning of the year, those who had failed parts of the test. All three tests are given on the same day for the grade level, with a surprise make-up on Friday of that week, to catch those students who were absent on the scheduled test day.

The teachers in the high school do not use the State's Activity Booklets or other forms of preparation for the test. Administrators at the high school felt that teachers there see the BEST as a burden, "a nuisance".

While the high school does not presently have special remediation for students not passing all of the BEST, there was talk of reinstituting a BEST math class (General Math II). This class was in effect during the school year 1980-81 for students failing the math part of the BEST. The high school principal said that the special math course was dropped because it did not seem to make a difference in students passing the BEST. The high school principal expressed some concern about potential "legal problems" down the road with the graduation requirement, if they do not have remediation courses in place.

The school district is now considering a plan where in the senior year, those students not having passed the BEST will get a pre-test in October. If they do not pass it, they will be required to take a special course, "a BEST course". This pre-test and BEST course would only be for those students whose GPA would allow them otherwise to graduate. In the 1982-83 school year, of the 440 seniors, 24 of them had not yet passed the BEST.

3. The Test:

The administration felt they did have a positive reaction from the community on their decision to make the BEST part of the graduation requirement; "It was a popular decision."

As far as the BEST test itself, the assistant superintendent said that the school district "would not keep the BEST test if it were not mandatory." He as well as other administrators interviewed indicated that they would not keep the BEST if they did not have to. In characterizing the BEST, the assistant superintendent said that the "BEST is very basic material and doesn't measure the quality of education." He said that when the School Board asked him whether the BEST reflected the quality of education in the district he told them "No".

a. Locally-Scored Objectives:

Franklin school district had difficulty with the 10 locally-scored objectives. The math and the language arts teachers at the 8th grade handle the locally administered objectives. The assistant superintendent pointed out that the two math objectives really belonged, in their opinion, to the science department, and that the math teachers did not want to do them. He finally had to tell the math department to just do them.

The local objectives were difficult for the district to assess. The administrator felt that it was also hard to get consistency between teachers in their evaluations and measurements. The local objectives were not measured in "set aside test time," but are based upon observation and experience with the students. The assistant superintendent admitted that these judgements vary amongst teachers.

There was also a lack of coordination between buildings in measuring the local objectives. The second junior high closed in 1982. There reportedly was, however, no attempt previously to coordinate the testing of the local objectives between the two junior highs. This lack of coordination also is evident between the junior high and the high school.

The high school, according to the principal, does not handle the local objectives at all. He indicated that the decision to drop the local objectives at the high school level was made by the central office administration. This decision to not give the local objectives after the 8th grade, was made even though the local objectives are part of the state mandate.

b. The Answer Sheet:

All three of the BEST sub-tests are contained on one answer sheet. The central office administration indicated their preference for a separate answer sheet for each of the sub-tests of the BEST. One of the pet peeves of people interviewed is the administrative confusion in having to collect and redistribute the answer sheet for each student, on each of the three test days. (There is only one answer sheet for each student, so that the sheet has to be passed out and collected for each sub-test.)

c. Absentism:

The district does not have a make-up on the BEST at the 8th grade. They have their 3 days of testing and that is it. When asked, they said that absenteeism is not a problem.

d. Special Education Students:

They have 20 to 30 students with IEP's (Individualized Educational Programs). These students don't have to take the BEST unless their IEP so indicates.

C. Impact of the BEST in Franklin School District:

The administration and implementation of the BEST in Franklin, as in Gardenway, was a reaction to the publicity given to early test results. Unlike Gardenway, however, the pressure did not come from the broader community or school board, but from the central administration, that found the district's poor showing "embarassing". While the school administration did not particularly like the BEST test, they responded to the "public nature" of the test results by making improved test scores a priority. The question then is what was the "impact" of that response on the school curriculum, on teaching practices, on the allocation of resources, and on teachers?

1. Impact on the Curriculum:

From interviews with teachers and administrators, it seems that in Franklin: "The textbook is the curriculum." At the same time, the administrators characterize teachers as having much discretion in what they do as far as "time on task" and sequencing of materials.

What impact there was on the curriculum was at the 8th grade level. The BEST, as indicated above, had no real impact on the high school curriculum. The two major areas of curriculum impact seem to be in the development of the special math course and in the addition of 3 to 4 units of economics in the first semester of the 8th grade, both responses to the BEST test. The school district's weakest areas on the BEST are in math (i.e., area, volume, and averages); they also had some difficulties on the government/economics sub-test. Franklin, like most school districts, had not taught economics at the junior high level. Even with the addition of the units of economics in the 8th grade, the assistant superintendent pointed out that there is much teacher discretion in how the social studies curriculum is handled.

Formal questionnaires were given to the department chairs concerning the curriculum areas covered by the BEST, from grades 6th through 12th, in 1977-78 and 1982-83. The responses and additional comments were consistent for both the elementary (6th grade) and the high school (9th-12th), that there was "no impact". The Director of Elementary Education had conducted a math and language arts curriculum review in 1979. Part of the review was a study of the correlation between BEST objectives and the curriculum. He found that all the BEST objectives were already part of the basic skills program, to varying degrees. However, nothing was added to, or changed in the curriculum. The review was seen mainly as a convenience for the teachers.

In social studies there was an acknowledged addition of several units of "economics" in the 8th grade, where it had not previously existed. The high school chair indicated that teachers in the remedial 9th grade "Citizenship" and the 11th grade "American History" courses might pay some attention to the BEST objectives, but they are not required to do so as a matter of policy. "Consumer Economics" is not in the social studies curriculum, having been shifted to the Home Economics Department some years ago.

The pattern of impact on the curriculum shows greater impact in the teaching areas covered by the BEST, and at the junior high (8th grade) level rather than in the high school. Seventy-three percent of the junior high teachers responded "yes," the BEST caused them to change course content; seventy-one percent of teachers at the high school said "no". Ninety-one percent of the junior high teachers responded that the BEST caused them to change the sequencing of curriculum; eighty-six percent of the high school teachers responded "no" to this question. Eighty-two percent of the junior high teachers said that the BEST affected how much time they spent on particular parts of the curriculum and caused them to introduce supplemental materials into their course; only fifty-seven percent of the high school teachers felt affected in either of these two ways. None of the teachers, however, felt that the BEST caused them to change the textbooks they used.

2. Allocation of Resources:

The financial "costs" of implementing the BEST in Franklin were minimal. An administrator described the costs of the BEST as the money spent on two math teachers during a summer. This allocation came out of central office funds.

None of the teachers saw "a lot" of money being spent on the BEST, but forty-six percent of the 8th grade teachers saw "some money" being spent on implementing the BEST and helping to prepare students for it; this went down to twenty-nine percent for high school teachers.

With the new requirement to pass the BEST as part of the high school requirement, the allocation of additional resources seems likely. A General Math II. and BEST classes are already being discussed. It will be interesting to see how Franklin responds to its own mandate of having the BEST a requirement for graduation.

3. Impact of the Test on Teaching: The perceived impact on teachers was split at the junior high level from "very negative" to "positive", with "no impact" being the major response by high school teachers. Ten of the eleven junior high teachers interviewed felt that there was some impact on their teaching from the BEST; five out of the six teachers interviewed at the high school level felt there was "little to no impact" on their teaching because of the BEST.

A majority of the junior high teachers felt that they were using different methods or examples to present materials because of the BEST; a majority of the high school teachers did not see this type of impact.

4. Impact on High School Graduation:

The impact of MCT on students was not the focus of this study, though the concern for students and their lack of basic skills was part of the motivation in Franklin to include the BEST in the requirements for graduation. There was also a feeling that students were not taking the test seriously, because it had no jeopardy attached to it. The school officials wanted to put some "teeth" in the testing mandate.

When the school board passed the graduation requirement, there was discussion about having two separate diplomas, an attendance diploma and an academic diploma. The school board decided against this distinction. With the high school requirement in place, it is likely that the BEST will have much more significance at the high school than it has in the past.

It is too early to tell what significance the graduation requirement will eventually have on school practices. Counselors involved at both the junior and senior high school levels indicated that they would be looking at the test more, now that it was part of the high school graduation requirements. The counselors admitted though that presently the "results of the test are really not looked at by anyone." Counselors indicated that they "don't use the test for diagonistic purposes." Any diagonsis is part of the preparation for the test (e.g., the pre-post test of sample questions); no one seems to look at the BEST test scores themselves. With the new high school graduation requirement, the counselors felt that students will be more motivated to take the test seriously, and that they will also have to be more concerned about high school students who have failed to pass the BEST.

5. Teacher Responses and Evaluations:

Of the eighteen teachers responding to the question concerning the impact of the BEST and how they would evaluate it, seven saw the impact "positively", three saw it "negatively", and four high school teachers saw "no impact". In the other two Missouri school districts in this study, teachers overwhemingly felt that the impact of the BEST was "negative." The Franklin teachers saw the impact in areas dealing with curriculum, teachers, and students. High school teachers interviewed saw a major impact at the high school, because of the graduation requirement. When asked specificially about the impact on the curriculum, the junior high teachers were split as to whether the impact was positive or negative; the high school teachers did not see any impact at the high school level.

As far as the impact on their own teaching, fifty-five percent (6 teachers) felt the BEST had a "favorable" impact, with the rest of the teachers responded "no impact"; all of the high school teachers (7) saw "no impact" of the BEST on their own teaching. No particular pattern as to the amount of time teachers spent on the BEST each day, week or during the course of the semester showed up in the teachers' responses. The high school teachers were more apt to respond "no time" to these questions than were the junior high teachers. The additional record keeping because of the BEST was also more evident at the 8th grade level than in the high school.

Seventy-three percent of the 8th grade teachers responded negatively to the question of whether the BEST has meant that school resources, such as money and time, have been diverted from other aspects of the curriculum, and spent on BEST related activities. The junior high teachers, much more than the high school teachers, "agreed" that the BEST has made the curriculum more standardized throughout the district and decision-making on curriculum more centralized. While the large majority of teachers "disagreed" with the statement: "I feel that I have less say in what I teach in my own courses and when and how I teach particular materials," seventeen out of the eighteen respondents interviewed were tenured teachers.

In response to the question concerning pressure to "teach for the test," there was more pressure felt at the junior high level than at the high school. (64% felt pressure at the junior high; 86% of the high school teachers "disagreed" that they felt pressured.) There was also more pressure felt for students to do well on the test at the junior high level (64% felt pressure), as compared to only 14% (1 teacher) feeling pressured at the high school.

In response to the question: "The existence of the BEST has caused us to think more systematically about what we are trying to teach and how we do it," 64% of the junior high teachers "agreed"; 71% of the high school teachers "disagreed". Both junior and senior high teachers "disagreed" that the BEST meant that they emphasized minimum eduational achievement instead of other educational objectives in the curriculum, but junior high teachers were more split on the question than were high school teachers. None of the high school teachers felt their performance as teachers were judged by how well their students did on the BEST; five out of the eleven junior high teachers (46%) felt that they were judged "indirectly" by their students' performances on the BEST.

In asking teachers about how much attention is paid to the performance of students on the BEST, we were interested in knowing "who" paid the most attention: teachers; administrators; district administrators; local school board; or the general public in the community; and from which of the groups did the teacher feel the most pressure and how was it transmitted? While generally the teachers saw themselves and others paying attention to the BEST, 8th grade teachers, as compared to the high school teachers, perceived more attention is paid to the BEST by all these other groups. The district administration was seen overwhelmingly as paying the most attention to the test; the school board and community the least. The junior high teachers felt more pressure than did the high school teachers, and they felt the most pressure from the district administration. Teachers cited pressure through oral and written messages, through department meetings, and also transmitted indirectly. A majority of the teachers felt that the schools were being judged by the BEST. The number of teachers feeling judged by the test was lower than in Gardenway, but higher than in Riverton, the third Missouri district studied.

The teachers at the junior high and high school level were split as to how seriously students there take the BEST. The junior high teachers felt the students took the test seriously; the high school teachers did not. This, of course, was the motivation for making the test part of the high school graduation requirements. All of the teachers (100%) responded "yes," that they like having the passing of the BEST as a requirement for high school graduation. In both of the other Missouri districts studied, 100% of the teachers said "no," that they would not like to see the BEST used as a requirement for high school graduation.

The teachers in Franklin felt that the BEST has served as a tool for both diagnosing and remediating the particular problems of students (through the pre-tests), and also as a tool for evaluating the performance of the local schools and holding them accountable. The majority of the teacher respondents, however, said that they have never used the BEST score results to diagnose individual student weaknesses (67%). This response is typical across the Missouri districts where interviewing took place. Once the test is over teachers seem to have little interest in the test data and what it might tell them about students' weaknesses. Any diagonistic help seems to be a by-product of preparing students to pass the test, rather than using the test results themselves. To a greater extent, the Franklin teachers (at least at the 8th grade level) used the BEST scores to evaluate where greater emphasis needs to be in their classes; 8 out of the 11 junior high and 3 out of the 7 high school teachers responded that the test scores did have this impact.

The teachers and administrators in Franklin saw the publicity surrounding the BEST test as "negative". Only one teacher and no administrator responded that the BEST publicity has a positive impact. When asked whether they would choose to keep the BEST if it were no longer mandated by the state, there was a mixed reaction. Twelve of the teachers said "yes" and six said "no". Of the administrators, two said that they would keep the test, three said "no", and one had mixed feelings.

6. The Test and The Public:

As part of the study, four non-school people were interviewed: two school board members and two citizens who were members of the school district Disciplinary Committee. All four of the citizens said that "yes", they would choose to keep the BEST even if the state no longer mandated the test. There was much more enthusiasm on the part of the representatives of the community for the BEST than from within the school administration.

Based on the interviews in Franklin, positive comments concerning the impact of the BEST included: "Students, teachers and school should be held accountable;" "The test brought about a needed change in the curriculum, though it needs to be at the 11th grade level and closer to graduation to be more relevant to them (the students);" "It gives the students a basis by which they can evaluate themselves against others in the state;" "It motivates students;" "It helps to standardize the curriculum--too many teachers were going their own way before."

On the other side, those who would not choose to keep the BEST made the following comments: "I dislike standardized test such as minimum competency tests;" "The BEST changed the curriculum in social studies;" "The test is not testing student achievement, but how well the system does on communicating those 13 objectives;" "The test is over-emphasized;" "The test is at too low a level --the language arts part is too easy;" "There is no connection between the BEST and what students are learning."

D. Summary:

Franklin school district is dealing with problems of a transient student population, low level citizen participation in the schools, and test scores on the BEST which rank in the lower third county-wide. Their own expectations are modest. They have no illusions of ranking at the top of the county districts with their BEST scores, but they do want by their own equation to be respectable. Comments of top administrators indicate that they identify with certain school districts in the county, and compare themself to several within that group. It is important to school administrators to compete successfully, and to do well enough not to be embarassed. They do not see themselves as competing with the wealthy suburbs, whose student population are high achievers who mostly go on to college.

Given the lower-achieving student population, Franklin administrators and teachers seem to be comfortable with BEST scores in the 70's percent passing. The graduation requirement will, in their opinion, put "teeth" into the test and help motivate students to take the test (and the required basic skills) more seriously. They have mixed feelings about the BEST; if they have to give it they want the leverage to make students pay attention to it. Their graduation requirement gives them that leverage. It still is to be seen, however, how they will further respond to remediation needs at the high school level for those students not passing the BEST.

VII. RIVERTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

A. School/Community Context:

The choice of Riverton was made for several reasons. Riverton School District is located in a rural area. Much of the publicity on BEST test scores focussed on the media's comparisons of urban and suburban school districts. There were no similiar comparisons of school districts in the Riverton area newspapers. Since the "score card" nature of the comparisons of the school district rankings seemed to be an important factor in school district and building level responses to the test, we wanted one district that did not have to contend with this intense public scrutiny. We also were interested in having a non-metropolitan district among our Missouri districts.

Riverton school district draws its student population of 2,700 from both the city of Riverton (population of approximately 10,000), and the surrounding rural area. Unlike both Gardenway and Franklin, Riverton has only a small percent of black students. It also is not part of the metropolitan school desegregation suit, which was pending at the time this research was carried out.

The school district has a grade structure of K-6, a 7-9th grade junior high school, and a 10th-12th grade high school. The Riverton area has a strong parochial school system at the elementary level; the public high school draws 25% of its 9th graders from private schools where they do not have to take the BEST. Approximately 75 students in each of the high school classes comes from parochial elementary schools, where the BEST is not required. This means that these students have to take the BEST at the high school level. A higher percent of students starting high school graduated in Riverton (84.1%), than in either Franklin or in the Gardenway school districts.

BEST scores for 8th graders in Riverton over the five years in which we have data, ranged from 61% (the pilot year) to 72% (1979), 56% (1980), 64% (1981), 80% (1982), and 75% (1983). The percentages passing have fluctuated over the years. The test score rankings put Riverton between Gardenway and Franklin school districts in percentage of 8th grade students passing the state scored part of the BEST.

The expressed position of the Riverton school people is that as long as their BEST scores average about the same as the state, they are acceptable. (The percentage of pupils in Missouri passing all three state-scored subtests went up over the five years of testing, from 60% passing in the 1978 pilot year, to 67.5% passing in 1981 and increasing to 76.5% in 1982.) Riverton's scores tended to stay around the state's average.

The Riverton school board had looked into making the BEST part of the high school graduation requirement. The school administration was very opposed to the graduation requirement, and the school board did not act on this idea.

The high school principal argued that the standards of the BEST are too low: "The minute we put a minimum in, it becomes a maximum for us, but that does not mean that the kids are academically sound." He added that, "It is not bad necessarily to have a minimum competency test for graduation, but not the BEST." He did suggest that if it were made a graduation requirement, the public's focus on passage of the BEST would shift from the eighth grade to the high school.

School staff in Riverton tended to see the BEST as an accountability measure; this was especially true for the junior high because of media focus on eighth grade BEST scores. When the BEST scores for the high school, for example, were reported at a school board meeting with the press present, the scores were not printed in the newspaper, although the 8th grade BEST scores are. Thus, while Riverton did not have to contend with a competitive "box score" reporting on their percentage of 8th graders passing the BEST or how they ranked compared to 10 or 20 other districts, they did, in fact, have to deal with the attention the media paid to the BEST.

B. Administration/Implementation of the BEST:

As in the other districts studied in Missouri, the administration of the BEST in Riverton is focussed on the 8th grade level. The principal of the high school said that teachers were made aware of BEST objectives, but are not told who has failed the sub-test(s). The superintendent reported that students after the 8th grade did not take the BEST seriously and that 25% of the seniors had still not passed all of the sub-tests.

The BEST is administered by the junior high and senior high counselors in their respective buildings. A 1982 memorandum from central office listing the schedule for the administration of the test, stated at the end: "Test administrators and monitors can instruct students about marking their answer sheets correctly, but do not try to interpret individual test items, and do not answer questions about indivi-dual items on the test."

1. The Locally-Scored Objectives:

Riverton experienced major difficulties with the ten local objectives on the BEST. These ten objectives (8 in language arts and 2 in math) caused much frustration amongst the Riverton school people.

A local newspaper article from 1979 reports that Riverton students improved their performance on BEST state objectives in 1979, but only 10.1% of the students passed all of the local objectives. The article goes on to list the local objectives and notes that students performed best on recognizing ideas and details from speeches and worst on following oral or written directions. The superintendent's comments to the school board, and also reported in the local newspaper, were that the local objectives are set higher than the state's objectives and were based on an "acceptable standard" rather than on a "minimum". School board members were publically supportive of the district's position that the higher standard for the local objectives would benefit students more than a test designed to make the district "look good".

One administrator, who was interviewed, did indicate that the staff was embarassed by the low rate of passage on the local objectives. While the administration did not want to seemingly react to their publicized BEST local objectives scores, internally they had decided to grade their local objectives at a lower standard. In 1982, however, still only 13.8% of the 8th graders passed all of the locally evaluated language arts objectives. It seems that the administration did not want to appear to be influenced by the BEST, but in fact, it was bothersome to them when these "low percentages" were publicized.

There was no apparent consistency in measuring the local objectives, district-wide in Riverton. The 7th and 8th grade teachers coordinate their standards for measurement, since all teachers in subject areas have planning time together. The math and science departments in the high school work together on the math local objectives. There is not coordination, however, between the junior high and the senior high in measuring the BEST local objectives, nor is this seen as being important. There was a feeling expressed by the school personnel that the state did not give enough direction on standards for the local objectives, and that teachers had to take too much time to prepare for them. Administrators' resentment in being told by the state that they had to grade local objectives, without any criteria or standards being set, was seen in their reluctance to systematically gear up for the local objectives.

2. Implementation at the High School:

At the high school the three department heads--english, math, and social studies and two counselors were the staff involved with the BEST test. Other teachers at the high school do not get involved with the BEST. The BEST is administered at the high school in the cafeteria over a three day period, one sub-test each day. The students are given two hours to complete the test, according to an administrator. The BEST, however, is supposed to be an "untimed" test.

Record keeping for the BEST is reported to be bothersome at the high school level. Getting school transcripts and testing the large numbers of students who attended parochial elementary schools, but the Riverton public high school, is seen as time consuming. In 1982-83 school year, 219 students in the 9th grade, 89 students in the 10th grade, 50 students in the 11th grade, and over 40 students in the 12th grade still needed to pass the BEST. The superintendent noted that the next step towards better preparation for the test was emphasis on the basic skills in the elementary grades, and having ninth grade teachers also review weak areas. Riverton did not institute any specific remediation at the high school level on the BEST. There was an expressed concern on the part of administrators that the BEST not take on an over-whelming importance in Riverton. This general concern about being overly influenced by the test and responding to test results, also meant that there was not much follow-up on students not passing the test.

3. Summary:

The Riverton superintendent's viewpoint on the BEST was publicized in the November, 1978 MISSOURI SCHOOLS magazine. He said: "A review of the results of the Basic Essential Skills Test...woud appear to direct our system to take two different steps. First, it is apparent that in some areas tested, a review of materials, prior to the taking of the BEST, would produce better test results. We are discussing concepts that students already understand, and a review would serve to refresh the content. My primary concern, however, is those areas where the BEST has indicated the students have not grasped the ideas previously presented.... Within our group, there were some areas that will require an emphasis in the primary and intermediate grades, if weaknesses are to be overcome.... A personal concern I have is that a school might make curricular changes based on the BEST and then find that some of the strengths of its former program have vanished.

The administration initially seems to have had a concern about too much importance being attached to the BEST, with some negative consequences for the rest of the curricula. The strong unhappiness with the test on the part of the administrators, however, was based on the public reporting of the test score results. The superintendent expressed the fact that the state had promised that school district scores would not be made public. When, in fact, the media focused on these BEST results, Riverton administrators saw it as a broken promise on the part of the state. There was the feeling that the media exposure on the BEST has been a bad thing. There seemed to be some comparisons with other districts in the area, even though (unlike the other two districts in our study), there are no published comparative scores. Individual districts' scores are, however, published separately and it is easy to make the comparisons with surrounding districts.

Administrators' comments suggested that they felt other school districts would do anything in order to get high test scores on the BEST, and that "cheating is not unusual". Riverton administrators said that they did not cheat on the test. The administrators feel that the attitude of the students towards the BEST is bad; that they do not take it seriously after the 8th grade. Because of the large number of parochial school elementary students, who attend Riverton public high school, many have to take the BEST for the first time in high school. The counselors and administrators consider the BEST "a pain," and make no special provisions to prepare high school students for the test.

C. Impact of the BEST:

1. Impact on the Curriculum:

There was stronger agreement in Riverton, than in the other two Missouri districts, that BEST did cause teachers to "think more about the curriculum". Junior high teachers tended to perceive the BEST test as having a greater impact on the curriculum than did the senior high department chairs or administrators. When asked specifically about the impact of the BEST on the curriculum, the three high school department chairs said there was "none;" the majority of the junior high teachers interviewed said there was an impact. When asked, however, to evaluate that impact the junior high teachers tended to say that it was "negative".

While the curriculum was not changed substantially, the BEST did have an impact on the curriculum in the 8th grade American History course, where units on economics were added. This was to reflect the fact that the social studies sub-test of the BEST was government/economics, and that the district had previously not covered economics at the 8th grade level. The local language-arts objectives also have required adjustments in the language-arts curriculum, in order to cover the materials for the 8 locally-scored objectives. Placement or sequencing of material within the curriculum in math was altered because of the test and the need to cover certain material before the beginning of March. The BEST also brought about a greater emphasis on word problems and math applications in the curriculum.

Teachers respondents were consistent regarding their perception of the impact of the BEST on aspects of the curriculum: Little or no impact was seen at the senior high level; some impact at the 8th grade level.

Of the junior high respondents, 6 out of the 10 felt that the BEST had changed course content; 7 out of 10 felt that the sequencing of the curriculum had been changed because of BEST; 7 out of 10 felt that the amount of time spent on parts of the curriculum had been changed; 7 out of 10 felt that there had been the addition of supplemental materials.

The 3 chairs at the senior high and 8 out of the 10 teachers at the junior high felt that they had "not" changed textbooks because of the BEST. Junior high teachers felt that there was more record keeping because of BEST. The teachers at the junior high level were split as to whether the BEST caused a greater standardization in the curriculum (5 "yes" and 5 "no"); the 3 senior high teachers did not feel BEST had the impact of standardizing the curriculum.

According to the superintendent the curriculum was not changed in preparation for the BEST, though the faculty were supposed to stress areas in which weaknesses were shown. Unit reviews were also scheduled before the test. Other administrators agreed that the BEST was not overly affecting the district's curriculum. As one principal put it: "We look at the curriculum-- does it fit into the BEST? But we don't want to make BEST the curriculum." He allowed that they may want to change something in the curriculum to accomodate an objective, but he does not want the change merely for the sake of looking good on the BEST. His comment was: "Our curriculum is not designed around the BEST. If it is, I'd better not find out that it is."

2. Impact on Teaching:

The BEST scores fell in 1980 (-16%). In the Franklin school district, after the 1980 decline in scores, the school administrators geared up to raise test results on the BEST. School administrators in Riverton, in discussing the drop in the Riverton's BEST scores in 1980, commented in a newspaper article that Riverton teachers simply do not ever teach the test, though all three departments use a study guide in connection with BEST objectives. There seem to be strong norms within Riverton not to overly react to the BEST. However, as seen in the responses of the teachers, changes were made in content and sequencing of subject matter curricular covered by the test, and time was spent on reviewing units in test areas. The impact on teaching reflects the changes in curricula, but more importantly, attitudes toward the test itself.

3. Attitudes Toward the BEST:

In seni-structured interviews, school personnel at both the junior high and senior high levels made the following points concerning their attitudes toward the implementation of the BEST and its impact on the Riverton School District.

Riverton's superintendent characterized the administration's attitude as being negative toward the test, saying "It's a big farce." Other administrators interviewed echoed the same feelings: "BEST is a pain in the neck;" "The local objects are a pain;" "A pain in the butt rather than anything constructive;" "It's a bunch of bull;" "Everyone's (else) teaching to the test" were some of the comments expressed as reactions to the BEST.

None of the administrators nor couselors in Riverton were positive about the BEST. The local objectives are obviously a cause of frustration for the school district, because their students do so badly on them; yet they did not want to substantially change their standards. Time spent on the BEST was a common complaint of both the administrators and teachers. The negative feelings seemed to be stronger at the high school than at the junior high level. While the test was not meant to be an evaluation of the schools, the high school principal saw "accountability" as the only reason for the BEST. Generally, it was felt that the amount of time spent on administrating the test, especially the local objectives, left less time for other things deemed more worthwhile.

Generally, the BEST was characterized as having little worth, and would not have been kept by the administration if it were not mandatory. As one administrator put it when asked whether he would choose to keep the test: "Hell No! Students get nothing out of it. The test is only for accountability, with no impact on educational quality or on diagonsis and remediation of students."

4. Allocation of Resources:

While some money went into supplementary materials, respondents argued that they did not put in more money nor reallocate money because of the BEST. The need for BEST supplementary materials has not been significant enough to cause any demand for an increase in the "Instructional Supply" budget, commented one administrator.

5. The Test and the Public:

While Riverton does not have to deal with the "score box" district comparisons as do our other two Missouri districts, 8th grade scores are reported separately in the local newspapers and administrators were aware of how certain neighboring districts have done on the test. Administrators also get calls from the newspapers asking them their reactions to the percentage of 8th grade students passing the BEST that year.

The two school board members and two members of the school district advisory board, who were interviewed, commented that they did not want the school administration to teach to the BEST. Comments of one school board member included, "The most important impact of the BEST is the awareness of the public, board and teachers that not all kids are getting skills;" "Our initial concern was that the public would misinterpret this test. We worried that teachers would teach to the test. We wanted to stay with our basic curriculum and to hell with the BEST. We don't require it for graduation."

Another school board member, commenting that the media has used the BEST to compare districts, which was not the intent of the legislature: "Our basic philosophy is that we don't want our teachers to teach to that test to make the district look good. The teachers may feel more pressure than I do. They might be changing the curriculum unconsciously."

The two members of the Riverton school district citizens' Advisory Board took a somewhat different posture than either the school administrators or the two members of the school board. Both active citizens said that they would "choose" to keep the BEST, even if it were not mandated by the state. These two citizens were aware of how neighboring school districts scored on the BEST relative to Riverton, and had expectations within which they felt their school district should score: "A school district, especially in an area like this, needs some idea of what kind of education it is giving its students," commented one active citizen. The feeling expressed was that it is easy for students to "fall through the cracks" in a close-knit community where educators assume they know the students well. The BEST, according to the two members of the Advisory Board, helps the school district know what the children are not learning. Both would like to have the test as part of the high school graduation requirements.

6. Teacher Responses and Evaluations:

Teachers' attitudes toward the BEST in Riverton were much like those in Gardenway-- negative. As in Gardenway, the impact of the test was felt more by teachers at the junior high (8th grade level) than at the high school (10th through 12th). In both school districts (Gardenway and Riverton), the BEST is not required for high school graduation and the focus for the test has been primarily at the 8th grade level, where it has had greater media visibility.

Teachers in Riverton described the test as having negative impact. The three department heads at the high school rated the impact as either "negative" or as having "no impact". The target of the impact was seem to be primarily "the teachers," with "curriculum" also mentioned. Most of the teachers interviewed (11 out of 13) did not feel that BEST meant that "teachers had less to say in what they teach in their own classes".

Teachers interviewed in Riverton perceived "less pressures" to "teach for the test" than did teachers in either Gardenway or in Franklin. (The strongest pressures on teachers to "teach for the test" seemed to be felt in Gardenway.) Correspondingly, there was less pressure on teachers to have their students "do well on the BEST," as compared to the other two Missouri districts studied. A majority of the teachers at the middle or junior high levels who were interviewed in the other two districts felt pressure to have their students do well; a majority of the teachers in Riverton did not. The Riverton teachers also "disagreed" that BEST caused them to emphasize "minimum educational objectives" at the expense of the rest of the educational program.

Importantly, a majority of the teachers did NOT feel that they were "judged" by how their students did on the BEST. (5 out of the 13 teachers did feel that they were judged by their students' performances on the BEST.) The teachers saw the school board and district administrators as paying the most attention to the BEST, followed by school administrators and the general public; teachers, as compared with these other groups, were perceived as paying the least amount of attention to the BEST.

The BEST seemed to be more important at the junior high than at the high school level. What pressure is present, seems to be conveyed in "indirect" ways to the teachers. The perception in Riverton tends to be that generally teachers are not judged by how their students do on the BEST. Teachers in both Gardenway and Franklin school districts felt judged to a greater extent by the performances of their students on the BEST. The message of the central administration and the school board that teachers were not to "teach to the test," and the fact that teachers after the 8th grade level had limited contact with the BEST, tended to isolate teachers from the influence of the BEST.

Teachers at the junior high level were more apt to see students taking the test "seriously" than at the senior high level. This stress at the 8th grade level, has been a consistent response in each of the districts studied in Missouri. Importantly, however, none of the teacher respondents wanted to see the BEST as part of the high school graduation requirements in Riverton.

As far as how the test was used in Riverton, 10 out of the 13 teachers did not see it used for "diagonistic" purposes. In addition, none of teachers interviewed saw the impact of the publicity of the BEST as being positive; they either felt there was no impact or that it was negative. Some of the Riverton teachers were surprised by the results of the BEST. The unexpected consequence cited by the teacher respondents was that students did "worse" than they would have expected, at least at the junior high level.

The teachers in Riverton who teach subjects covered by the BEST did not feel particularly influenced by the test. There was reflected general concern about how students did on the local objectives, but the emphasis was on the fact that their standards were higher than the states and that they should not be "teaching to the test," as other school districts were. In more indirect ways, however, both administrators and teachers indicated that they were concerned about the low scores on the local objectives and were re-thinking the standards they used to score them.

D. Summary:

There was more obvious and generalized hostility toward the BEST test in Riverton than in either Franklin or in Gardenway. There was an open resentment towards the State Department of Education in mandating the BEST, then allowing it to become a "public media event" to compare school districts, and a perception that many other districts were "cheating" on the test in order to get high scores. These strong negative feelings on the part of school people, coupled with a lack of community pressure to increase test scores, allowed the Riverton school district personnel to downplay the importance of the BEST within their own community.

VIII. IMPACT OF THE BEST IN MISSOURI

At the time of the research the BEST test requirement had been in place for four years. Most districts had also administered the test on a voluntary basis the proceding year. This period is long enough to begin to the assess the responses of local districts and the impact the test has had on school practices. One benefit of looking at a set of Missouri districts is to see how different districts responded to a common test requirement. Our discussion of impacts in the three districts has made clear how different the reactions have been.

In this section we want to note more systematically the variety of responses and to suggest factors that influence how school districts responded to the test mandate. Three local school districts were studied in depth. In the course of selecting those districts we interviewed administrators in three additional districts about their response to the state test requirement. Though our information on these additional districts is limited, their inclusion is useful as we identify the impacts and try to account for them.

In considering local district responses to the Missouri BEST two factors should be kept in mind. First, the state mandate is simple in form and content. It merely specifies that a particular state developed test is to be given to all eighth grade students at a given time each year. Students who fail to pass all parts of the test at the eighth grade must retake the test each year until they pass all sections or graduate from high school. No remediation is required. Districts are not required to alter their curricula. Failing the test does not have consequences for graduation or promotion, unless a local distircts decides to tie such a sanction to the test. Nor are school districts rewarded or punished on the basis of the performance of their students on the BEST. The simplicity of the requirement made it possible for districts to respond in a variety of ways.

Secondly, the public reporting of the test scores and the inter-district comparisons that followed became an important componant of the test program in Missouri. The publicity given to the test scores had not been anticipated by state administrators. In fact, the first year in which the test was given by districts on a voluntary basis, districts were told that district level scores would not be made public. However, the media obtained and publicized test scores by local district. The widespread publicity and public comparisons that followed shaped significantly the uses and impact of the test in the state.

Using the three districts from the case studies and the three other districts on which we gathered limited information, we can describe their responses in summary form as follows:

1. GABLE: IMMEDIATE ACCEPTANCE OF TEST AND STRONG COMMITMENT TO ASSURING STUDENTS DO WELL.

This was the response of a small middle class surburban district, with a strong financial base and a somewhat diversified student body. The Gable district promptly accepted the test and revised its curriculum and classroom activities to fit better the test objectives. School administrators and teachers felt strong pressure to make sure their students did well on test. The students in this district did very well on the test from the first year on. In this district the test had a major impact on the school program, and the community used its strong comparative position on the BEST to advertise itself and its schools.

2. GARDENWAY: DELAYED BUT SUCCESSFUL RESPONSE TO CONSIDERABLE COMMUNITY PRESSURE TO RAISE TEST SCORES WHEN STUDENTS FAILED TO PERFORM UP TO EXPECTATIONS.

This is how we characterize the response of the Gardenway District. Following the initial failure of the students to perform as well as expected, (especially in comparison with students in other districts), the school board and the administration set the improved test scores as a major objective. Teachers and building administrators felt under pressure to assure better performance. Courses were altered to help prepare students for the test. Many teachers responded negatively to these pressures. Community attention and concern with the BEST were perceived to be high.

3. KINGSTON: DELAYED RESPONSE TO CONSIDERABLE COMMUNITY PRESSURE TO RAISE TEST SCORES WHEN STUDENTS FAILED TO PERFORM UP TO EXPECTATIONS, BUT UNSUCCESSFUL.

The Kingston school district is a large heterogeneous district. It has a tradition of providing a high achieving college-bound student population with a good education. During the last twenty years the district has experienced significant socio-economic and racial shifts in its student population; neccessiting a dual school system to respond to the needs of a dwindling high achievement oriented white white population, an upwardly mobile middle class black population, and a low income black population. Test scores the first year were among the lowest in the metropolitan area. Kingston responded, a year later than Gardenway, with changes in the social studies curriculum and pre-tests for the BEST; The Kingston district, however, did not have sufficient resources or unity of purpose to make the effort to bring students' scores up to community expectations.

4. FRANKLIN: LACK OF COMMUNITY OR SCHOOL BOARD INTEREST BUT CONCERN ON THE PART OF THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION.

In the Franklin School District discussed above the school board and the community did not take much interest in the test and test results, but school administrators were concerned about lower than anticipated rankings during the first years. They made some effort to improve student performance, even making passage of the test a prerequisite for high school graduation.

5. WIMPLE: BOARD HOSTILITY TO TEST AND OFFICIAL POSITION THAT THE ADMINISTRATORS SHOULD NOT LET THE TEST INFLUENCE THE SCHOOL PROGRAM.

In a fifth district, Wimple, there was little interest in test results in the community and the board explicitly directed the administration to disregard the test scores and not to change what they were doing because of the test. The school board position was based, at least in part, on the feeling that it was not proper for the state to impose this sort of test on local school districts. The board felt that the local district was in the best position to judge the needs of its students. However, school administrators were disturbed by how poorly their students were doing and were, in fact, making changes in the program to help improve student BEST performances. This activity was undertaken without the knowledge nor approval of the school board.

6. RIVERTON: LACK OF INTEREST ON PART OF THE SCHOOL BOARD AND ADMINISTRATION, HOSTILITY TO THE TEST, AND SATISFACTION WITH THEIR STUDENTS' PERFORMANCES.

Riverton response to the test was minimal. It was given but considered a "real pain" by district and building administrators, who were supported in this view by the school board. There was no overt community pressure to raise test scores. Very little was done to prepare students for the test or to assist students who had had difficulties. The administrators were satisfied with how their students did compared to districts they thought comparable, and did not see the need to do anything more with respect to the test.

Three general factors influence how districts responded to the Missouri test mandate. (1) The level of interest and concern in the community; (2) The expectations of school leaders and their commitment to take the test seriously and to improve test scores; (3) School resources. We will elaborate on each of these.

A. "External Pressures":

One of the most important factors influencing local district response to the test was level of community and school board interest and their expectations about test results. Gardenway presents a good example of community pressures to take the test results seriously and to improve the BEST scores. There was a perceived sense in the community that the test scores in Gardenway should be among the very highest in the area. When the scores were only average in the initial years the school board, reflecting community interest, concerns, and expectations, set explicit goals for better performance. The pressures from the board to the school administrators were clear and explicit. At least 90% of the 8th grade students should pass the BEST. One year the School Board set an explicit goal to raise the percentage passing from 96% to 98%. The administrators and the teachers understood these expectations and felt pressured to respond to them. Explicit steps were taken to respond. These efforts and their results were discussed in the section on Gardenway.

In two of the other school districts mentioned above there was considerable community and school board interest in student performance on the BEST. In example number one, Gable, the community applauded the major efforts to maintain high test scores, even to advertising real estate based on their high performance. In the third example, Kingston, there was community interest and school board concern about the low comparative ranking of the school in their BEST performance. Some efforts were directed toward improving student performance, but the district lacked the resources and the unity of purpose exhibited by the first two districts. Kingston had a racially and economically heterogeneous student population and was attempting to run simultaneously a high level academic program for more gifted students and to provide extensive remedial programs for a large number of lower achieving students. This district, along with several others, was publically accused of "cheating" in the administration of the BEST. One teacher was fired after admitting having given students answers in the administration of the test. In her defense she said that she helped students because of the pressure from the district administration to raise test scores, "by whatever means necessary". In the Kingston case, strong community pressure did not manifest itself in significantly higher test scores, but rather in teacher stress and anxiety.

In the other three districts teachers and administrators perceived little interest or pressure from the public and school board with respect to student performance on the test. In Wimple, the school board explicitly told the administrators not to respond to the comparative poor showing of their students on the BEST. The actions that were taken to improve the curriculum to better prepare students for the BEST were instigated by the administrators behind the scene. Similarly actions taken in the Franklin district to help students on the best were instigated by the school administrators. In Riverton the lack of school and community pressure meant that the district did little to respond to the test.

B. Internal Expectations and Commitment:

Community and school board pressures were not the only factors influencing school district responses to the BEST. From formal interviews with school district personnel in our study and conversations with administrators from several other districts another factor emerges as important. School administrators seem to have their own "expectations" of how their district should perform on tests like the BEST. They seemed to have clear expectations of how their students should do in comparison with those of other districts. These expectations came from their perceptions of their student body and from the achievement of other school districts with which they identify.

In several instances school administrators felt no pressures from the community nor the school board, but were trying to meet their own expectations with respect to student performance on the BEST. Several district leaders felt their reputations as leaders in education were at stake and that their students had to perform up to particular standards; other district administrators felt that as long as they performed as well as several identified districts, they were happy. Still other educators felt that given the characteristics of their student population, there was little they could do to improve the test performance.

In all cases school administrators had an identifiable level of expectation. The response of the districts in terms of devoting resources toward test related activities was determined in part by whether or not they saw their students meeting those expectations during the initial years of the BEST. Districts one and two had expectations that they should perform among the best. When the initial Gardenway results did not measure up to those expectations the district made a major effort to achieve improved test scores. In Riverton administrators were pleased with their scores as long as they were above the state average and compared favorably with the several districts around them with which they identified. They were not interested in comparing themselves with the affluent suburban districts of the large metropolitan area close by.

In Franklin and Wimple the school boards and the community at large did not seem concerned with test results but administrators felt their own reputations were at stake and made efforts to assure that their students were not performing at the bottom. Administrators in these two districts had similar socio-economic school population and compared themselves with each other. Their major reference points for mearsuring expectations was to compare favorably with a few selected districts. They did not pressume to compete with wealthy upper middle class school districts.

The identification of these individual expectations or references points and a notion of how students performed in relation to them during the initial testing years, seems important in determining how the district responded to the imposition of the state test. The importance of this particular determinate was itself an outcome of the public reporting of district test results and the inter-district comparisons which followed.

C. The School District Resources

The financial and personnel resources of school districts vary considerably. The nature of the student body: e.g., stablity vs. mobility of the student population; the range of special courses needed to respond to the variety of achievement levels, also influences how resources are distributed within a school district. In the Missouri districts we studied, these factors varied and affected responses of local districts.

In several of the districts, major efforts were put into preparing students to take the BEST. The cost/benefit ratio of putting extensive resources of time and money into getting students to pass a test is exemplified in Gardenway. Gardenway was able and willing to direct considerable resources toward raising test scores and their efforts paid off. However, our study of Gardenway indicates that there were great costs involved, especially with respect to teacher resentment and stress and the deferral of efforts directed toward other programs.

The trade-offs between nearing that goal of 100% students passing and the costs of concentrating school resources so intensively on materials covered in the test, have to be weighed against each other. The additional costs of raising test scores even one percentage point at a high level, may take an inordinate amount of resources.

More importantly than the amount of actual resources, however, were the attitudes and values behind the decisions of how to allocate those resources, of how important the BEST was to the school district. Individual school district responses to the BEST, as far as resource allocation and impact on the curriculum, were determined by the values of school board members and school administrators. In cases where the school board cared greatly about the scores on the BEST, e.g., Gardenway, the school administrators responded, even when they were less convinced about the actual worth of the test. In Kingston there was considerable concern about comparatively low test scores, but the district was not in a position to devote extensive resources toward raising the scores.

D. Impact on the Curriculum:

The state test was imposed upon local districts with diverse curricula. The schools were being held accountable for a "floor" of basic skills in three areas determined by the state. The test content reflected what personnel at the State Department of Education and consultants thought students should know, rather than reflecting what was in fact taught in the curricula.

The imposition of the BEST had several impacts on the curriculum. First, it led to changes in the content, sequencing, and approaches used in some courses. Second, special test preparation courses or material units were introduced to help prepare students for the test. The greatest impact across the districts was in social studies. School curricula in this area were greatly affected by the inclusion of government and economics as a sub-test. Government (or civics) has traditionally been taught in the 9th grade and economics has tended to be taught in the high school, if it is in the curriculum at all. Since the BEST initially is given at the 8th grade level and because most of the publicity is centered on the results of the eighth grade testing, most districts responded by making some changes in social studies curriculum. Units on law and economics were interjected into the 8th grade social studies curriculum. Gardenway was in the process of restructuring its social studies curriculum to better reflect the BEST at the 8th grade level. Because of the widespread discrepency between the law and economics content of the BEST and the exisiting curricula, the greatest impact on the curriculum was in the area of social studies at the 8th grade level.

The next greatest impact from the BEST has been in math. The BEST had the effect of encouraging the use of more math word problems and math applications. Respondents in all the school districts studied commented that they had introduced more word problems and applications of math concepts.

The least impact of the BEST on the curricula is in the area of language arts. This is for two reasons. First, the reading level on the BEST language arts sub-test is lower than on the other two sub-tests, meeting reading level requirements for most curricula. Secondly, the skills called for in the language arts sub-test reflected better what was already being taught in the elementary schools. Therefore, districts throughout the state tended to perform the best on the language-arts sub-test.

E. Teacher Responses:

School district personnel, to the extent that they feel the benefits derived from the minimum competency test exceed the perceived costs, tend to be happy with the particular testing program. The type of benefits derived from the BEST cited in districts studied include: helping marginal students or students who tend to "fall through the cracks;" making teaching easier because of the additional leverage on students through the test; putting additional resources into the system; providing a floor for basic skills.

In the Missouri districts, positive responses from teachers concerned students and the feeling that some students were getting help who were not being helped before. Several positive comments also reflect upon the impact on the curricula, especially in the outcome of increased word problems in math. Riverton, by providing the jeporady of a graduation requirement as part of the BEST, was cited by some teachers as giving them leverage with students to take the test more seriously. Gardenway, on the other hand, without the graduation requirement, put such stress on the test that students were made to take the test seriously, but teachers often responded that the costs were not worth the outcome of almost 100% passing.

The "costs" of the BEST to the district include: financial-- especially in cases where resources were perceived as coming from other programs; effects on the curriculum perceived as being detrimental or at least not beneficial (comments tended to be directed toward changes in the social studies curriculum); and stress and hostility from teachers who feel that they unfairly are being held "accountable" for how their students do on the BEST. In the Missouri districts there was a direct correlation between how much effort and pressures the central office administrators put on the BEST, and the amount of anxiety, stress, and even hostility teachers expressed over the test. Thus of the teachers interviewed, the most negative attitude toward the BEST was in Gardenway, where the greatest effort was made to achieve high test results. There were major differences in perspectives between the central office administrators and the classroom teachers in Gardenway over the implementation of the BEST. Teachers tended to be more negative than administrators, and teachers in the one building, where more stress was placed on test achievements, were more hostile toward the test than in the other building.

F. Use of Test Results:

Teachers tend not to use standardized test data to diagnose students' weaknesses, unless it is required. One of the interesting results from this study of school practices was the across-the- board limited use of BEST data for diagonistic and remediation purposes.

The pre-post tests, developed by school districts and used to prepare students to take the BEST, were utilized extensively in districts to place students in appropriate classes or to further screen students who needed help to pass the BEST at the 8th grade level. These test results were analyzed by test item, with scores going home to parents. Gardenway, of the districts we studied in depth, did the most extensive pre-testing of students, though all the districts provided some preparation. Two other districts in which we had conversations concerning the implementation of the BEST, also had some form of screening and pre-testing for the BEST.

Interestingly, however, once the BEST test was given, the results were not used for remediation purposes. None of the school districts studied reported that teachers ever asked to see students' test scores, even when the information was made accessible in counselors' offices. The goal seems to be "passing the BEST." Once that hurdle is completed, there seemed to be little interest in the test data. Test results for students "just passing" is not reviewed for weak areas or areas where improvements are needed; students failing to pass are not worked with until the following year, when depending upon the school district, some additional help (e.g., tutorial after school), may be provided. The goal obviously is to "pass the test," not remediation, or only remediation as a way to pass the test.

G. Publicity:

In the case of the Missouri BEST it is clear that the pressures, either internal or external, would not have been as great without the extensive publicity given to local district test scores -- especially the public inter-district comparisons of test results. While it was not the intent of the state department of education that student performances in school districts would be compared publically, this unintended consequence did much to cause many districts to seriously respond to the state mandate. In the absence of such publicity it is likely that many more districts would have simply given or played down the importance of the BEST. On the other hand the publicity tended to force an emphasis on measures to increase test scores and led to alledged and documented instances of cheating. Districts did spend time on pretesting and "cramming" before the test. These conditions led to considerable resentment against the test and for some district leaders, like those in Riverton, to consider the test a farce. The publicity seems to have caused those school districts that were concerned to put emphasis upon preparing the student explicitly for the test. Because the "public" pressure was off after the eighth grade testing, little emphasis was placed upon remediation and assisting students to pass the test after the eighth grade.

H. Conclusions:

The BEST provided an important stimulus to local districts in Missouri. The public reporting of district level data helped to assure this. Different districts responded differently depending upon the level of interest in the community, the expectations and commitements of school administrators, and the resources districts were able and willing to commit. Based upon these factors schools adjusted their curricula and developed mechanisms for preparing students for the test. Because of the widespread discrepency between the test and existing curriculum in the areas of law and economics, test motivated curricula changes were in social studies.

The experience of Gardenway suggests that test scores could be raised when the commitment and resources are available, but that the costs can be high. The calculation has to be seen in terms of the "costs" and "benefits" to the district and to the students. How much resources are worth what percent of test score gains? If the district is spending time and attention in one area, what other areas get slighted? If low achieving students are beneficiaries of the testing program, what does this mean for high achievers? What consequences are there for teachers in situations where great pressure exists to maximize test scores, perhaps "at any cost"?

The imposition of the state minimum competency test had mixed consequences for local schools. Many teachers and administrators saw some positive benefits in terms of the focus on the curriculum and benefits for some students. However, much of the response to the test was negative. Many of the teachers disliked the pressures brought about because of the test, and the ways in which the BEST imposed changes in exisiting curricula and teaching practices. It is significant that none of the administrators reported that they would favor keeping the BEST if it were not required. Even in the districts in which students were performing well there was no interest in keeping the test.

It is also useful to note that in none of the districts was there any systematic post 8th grade test remediation. Little systematic effort was spent working with students who demonstrated weaknesses in particular areas by failing to pass specific parts or all of the BEST at the eight grade. Where special efforts were made they were directed toward getting as high a percentage of the students to pass the test in the eighth grade. The results of the BEST were not used much for subsequent student evaluation and remediation. With the 1983 revision which requires the passing of the test for graduation we would anticipate that more emphasis will be placed on post eighth grade remediation.

PART THREE

OHIO

IX. OHIO CONSIDERATION OF MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTING

Before discussing the impact of minimum competency testing programs on the local districts in Ohio we describe briefly the protracted consideration of a state requirement in Ohio. When we began this study in the fall of 1982 Ohio was among the minority of states without a mandate on minimum competency testing. A state requirement was adopted by the State Board of Education in December of that year. However, the Ohio local districts in our study were administering locally initiated testing programs. Though state level action is less directly relevant for local school impact in Ohio than in Missouri, state activities are part of the context in which the Ohio districts adopted their testing programs. More specifically, anticipation of state action played a part in motivating local district action.

In December of 1982 the Ohio State Board of Education adopted a state mandate on competency testing. As part of a comprehensive revision of the "Minimum Standards for Ohio Schools" the Board adopted a requirement that local school districts develop competency based education programs. The testing of student competencies at three points over the twelve grades was part of this requirement. The provisions on competency based education and testing say in part:

> (B) (2) LOCALLY DEVELOPED COMPETENCY BASED EDUCATION PROGRAMS SHALL BE IMPLEMENTED FOR ENGLISH COMPOSITION, MATHEMATICS, AND READING.
>
> (a) Pupil performance objectives shall be established for English composition, mathematics, and reading.
>
> (b) Provisions shall be made for periodic assessment of pupil performance, including testing at least once in grades one through four, grades five through eight, and grades nine through eleven.
>
> (c) Guidelines shall be established for the use of assessment results for instruction, evaluation, intervention, guidance, and promotion decisions.
>
> (d) Intervention shall be provided according to pupil needs.

Implementation of locally developed programs was to begin no later than the 1984-85 school year, and full implementation was to be completed by the 1989-90 school year.

Although some aspects of the proposed revisions of the state standards elicited considerable public controversy, the provisions for competency testing received little interest or controversy in the hearings and adoption processes. The quiet adoption of a competency testing requirement in 1982 belies the intense conflict and maneuvering that had taken place over minimum competency testing a few years earlier. Enactment of the requirement followed a decade of discussion and conflict among state legislative and educational decision-makers over issues of school accountability, school assessment, and competency testing.

Several factors account for this quiet adoption.

First, the enactment constituted a formalization of understandings worked out several years earlier. Second, when the revised standards were adopted, most parties to earlier conflicts over minimum competency testing had other concerns about the new standards which were more important to them. Third, the requirement adopted was vaguely stated and it was not clear just what it would mean in operation. It was something most could live with -- at least in the short run.

Two aspects of the Ohio requirements for competency testing are particularly notable. First, the mandate was adopted comparatively late. Most states had enacted requirements by 1978. Second, the Board adopted a decentralized and minimally intrusive requirement. There was no "state test." Local districts were left considerable descretion with respect to test form, the grades tests were given, and the use and consequences of test results. The dual questions of why Ohio resisted so long the pressure for competency testing and why it chose a nonintrusive requirement are the focal points of our inquiry on Ohio activity on minimum competency testing. If Ohio experienced the same concerns about school performace and the pressure to do something about it, why did it not act sooner and why did it adopt a vague, non-intrusive mandate? The Ohio mandate contrasts in both timing and form with the Missouri program discussed above.

In order to understand Ohio consideration of school accountability and minimum competency testing we interviewed persons at the state department of education involved in the minimum competency testing issue, members of the state legislature who were involved in the controversy, and the leaders of some of the educational organizations. Interviews in the local districts also provided some insight into state level activity.

State and local level education leaders we talked with indicated that during the mid and late 1970's there had been considerable interest in a state level minimum competency testing mandate in Ohio. That interest evolved from the more general concerns about school performance and accountability. Two points were stressed with respect to these concerns.

First, the interest in Ohio was part of the wave of concern that was sweeping accross the nation. There was no particular state or local source or focal point for the concern. State and local leaders were aware of actions being taken elsewhere and were influenced by them, some positively and some negatively.

Second, there was no enduring, organized pressure for a minimum competency mandate. There was a perception that the public wanted action, but that "public" was vaguely identified and its concerns were not channeled through the organizational networks that generally deal with education issues. One veteran state legislature described the introduction of bills on competency testing as, "a reaction to the national stream of consciousness about minimum competency testing." A senior official at the State

Department of Education saw minimum competency testing as "an outgrowth of the accountability fad." He felt that the accountability notion was itself confusing and without much substance.

As in other states, the pressure to act on school performance and accountability was felt most keenly in the state legislature. Pressure for state action on minimum competency testing and other accountability measures was resisted by the state department of education and opposed by most educational interest groups.

State level activity on school accountability can be seen as a sequence of initiatives within the legislature. For the most part these initiatives were resisted and thwarted by the state Department of Education. Initially the Department sought to avoid any type of state mandate on minimum competency testing. Leaders in the Department were particularly opposed to the use of any statewide test that would permit interdistrict comparisons. When it became evident that the pressure for a requirement was too strong and persistant to avoid, the Department dropped its position of outright opposition and sought to assume control over the development of a program. If there had to be a program, it was beter to participate in shaping it, rather than to have a requirement forced on them.

The 1982 adoption by the State Board of Education represented compromises developed after a decade of complex manuevers involving members of the legislature, leaders at the State Department of Education, local school districts, and various educational interest groups. Chronologically the decade long struggle over school accountability measures that led to the Ohio requirement on competency testing can be looked at as four sequential actions: (1) The 1971 Accountability Mandate; (2) The 1976 School Assessment and Reporting Act; (3) The 1978 Report of the Advisory Committee on Minimum Competency Testing; and (4) The 1982 requirement for competency testing contained in the revised Minimum Standards.

A. Accountability Mandate.

The first important action was the 1971 request by the legislature that the Department of Education develop a structure for educational accountability. One of the "expert" reports developed as a response to this mandate described this legislative action as follows:

> Throughout society there is a press for educational accountability. The public is no longer willing to invest heavily in education without having some assurance that its investments will yield positive results. Hence, eleven states, including Ohio, now have recently enacted legislative mandates for accountability. ("Ohio Accountability Project Reports: Team One Report", p. ii.)

With this mandate the legislature directed the State Department of Education to:

> ... develop a comprehensive system for providing educational management information and accountability capabilities. The system shall be designed for eventual implementation on a state-wide basis and shall utilize the technology of the computer and related systems concepts. Developmental work by the department shall utilize pilot districts and shall strive, with regard to all public and nonpublic elementary and secondary

schools in the state to:

> (1) define those measureable objectives for which each facet and level of public education is to be held accountable;
> (2) identify pertinent data elements and devise methods and systems for fairly accurately and unifromly measuring and reporting the extent to which the defined objectives are met;
> (3) develop uniform files, methods and systems for collecting, processing, storing and analyzing data which will permit identification of these factors in the teaching-learning process which will have the greatest relevance to student performance;
> (4) develop uniform systems of reporting the findings of the program to all interested persons. . . . (Amended Substitute House Bill 475, the 109th General Assembly, 1971)

In response to the requirements the President of the State Board of Education appointed an Educational Redesign and Improvement Committee. Among other things that committee initiated a large scale project for citizen involvement called the "Search for Consensus." This project went directly to the people of Ohio to "define the measureable objectives for which schools are to be held accountable." In the report to the legislature this project was described as follows:

> The response of the "Search for Consensus" has exceeded all expectations. In May, 1972 604 school districts -- more than 95% -- held Local Citizen Seminars to identify the issues and priorities for public schools. In excess of 100,000 Ohioans were engaged in that series of meetings. Nearly 56,000 processable opinionnaires and 12,500 written recommendations for improving the school were received. In October , 1972 nearly 20,000 Ohioans, meeting in County Citizen Assemblies, reviewed the tentative goals and objectives which had been "factored" by the Ohio State University Evaluation Center from the data gathered at the May meeting. ("The Development of An Educational Accountability Model," The Ohio Department of Education, June 30,1973)

Concurrently with the "Search for Consensus" project the Department of Education contracted with three teams of experts to review accountability strategies. The three teams, representing very different perspectives on the accountability issue, each issued a report making recommendations on accountability measures.

On June 30, 1973 the State Superintendent of Public Instruction submitted the required report to the General Assembly. The report outlined the activities undertaken in reponse to the legislative mandate and noted that the State Board of Education had adopted a broad set of goals which could "serve as the broad framework in which further measurable objectives for all facets and levels of public education in Ohio can be developed." With respect to the accountability measures the report stated that six accountability instruments had emerged. They reflected great diversity and the lack of concensus about acceptable and proven accountability procedures. Rather than recommend any particular approach the report suggested that:

> ...due to the established principles of local school district decision-making authority and the varied characteristics of the more than 600 school districts in Ohio, each school district be provided with the option to use varied accountability procedures. Such an arrangement would be in keeping with the ways in which American education has improved. ("The Development of an Educational Accountability Model, p. 25.)

Given the absence of specific recommendations and the lack of consensus indicated, it is not suprising that the legislature did not push further the issue of accountability measures. In addition, the "search for concensus process" had created fears about the intrusion of the state into areas of school policy that were traditionally local perogatives. Communication of these concerns to the legislature by local school leaders also helped to dampen further legislative interest in this thrust for accountability. One top leader at the State Department of Education indicated, with some satisfaction, that the departemnt had achieved its objective. Overkill and confusion of the issue had been used to thwart the effort of the legislature.

B. School Assessment and Reporting.

The second significant legislative action in response to the school accountability movement was a 1976 enactment on school assessment and reporting. This act required an annual assessment of student performance which could be used to assess in a general way how Ohio schools were performing. It also required local school districts to publish annual reports to their constituents. The legislature appropriated $50,000 for the assessment. The Department of Education, however, wanted $200,000 to do the job. Annual assessments were done but they did not have the scope and impact hoped for by some in the legislature. The Department of Education argued that it could not do more on school assessment without considerably more money.

It quickly became apparent to those in the legislature interested in measures of school accountability that the school assessment and reporting was not going to provide the type of accountabiity they wanted. By this point the programatic focus of the nationwide accountability movement had shifted to minimum competency testing. The focus was beginning to be expressed in the Ohio legislature.

C. 1978 Reports on Minimum Competency Testing.

In the 1977, 1978, and 1979 sessions of the legislature there was considerable interest in a state mandate on minimum competency testing. Several bills were introduced during those years. For the most part they failed to make it out of legislative committees. None was brought to the floor for a vote in either house. Several legislators noted that during that period any reasonable bill requiring competency testing would have passed handily if a floor vote had been taken. Among legislators there was a perception of widespread support for a competency testing measure among the general public. Many legislators thought it important to respond to this concern, despite the opposition of most of the educational establishment.

In the spring and summer of 1977 two important moves took place. In August the state legislature adopted a provision in a bill authorizing funding for the Assessment and Annual Progress Report Advisory Committee requiring that in addition to its regular responsibilities that committee:

> shall use the results of the Annual Educational Assessment Program to make recommendations to the State Board regarding the implementation of minimum competency examinations as a prerequisite for promotion of all pupils to grades five and nine and for graduation from high school. Such recommendations shall be transmitted to the

> chairmen of the Senate and House Education Committees of the General Assembly no later than July 1, 1978. (Amended Substitute Senate Bill 221, Ohio General Assembly, August 1977.)

This move was an expression of the feeling that the school assessment and reporting measures were not providing the level of school accountability desired.

The other move was at the Department of Education. In April 1977 the Superintendent for Public Instruction, recognizing the strong and persistent interest in a competency testing requirement, established an internal Task Force on Minimum Competency Expectations. This represented a change of strategy by the department. Prior to this point the leadership in the department had strongly opposed any minimum competency testing program. With the appointment of the task force the Department sought to take control of the consideration of a minimum competency testing requirement. If the political climate required some sort of state mandate they wanted to play the major role in shaping it.

The internal department task force and the broadly representative Assessment Advisory Committee worked together to gather and evaluate information on minimum competency testing and in formulating recommendations for the legislature. The Assessment Advisory Committee included representation from most of the organized educational interest groups as well as state legislators and academic experts. The report of the committe summarized the information gathering procedures as follows:

> 1. A major survey of minimum competency

practices utilized in other states was conducted in the summer of 1977.

2. A symposium with representatives of six state departments of education having the most active involvement in minimum competency programs was held in August, 1977.

3. The Assessment Advisory Committee reviewed the 1977 Ohio Education Assessment data to determine the relevance of a minimum competency program.

4. Thirteen regional Forums on Educational Competence were held to gather testimony from the citizens and educators of Ohio on Saturdays from Februray 18 through April 15, 1978.

5. Participants of the May 16-17, 1978 Martha Holden Jennings Conference were asked to comment on a tentative report prepared by the Committee prior to the submission of a final Report to the State Board of Education on June 12, 1978. ("Report and Recommendations on Minimum Competencies," Subitted by the Assessment and Annual Progress Report Advisory Committee to the State Board of Education and the Ohio General Assembly, June, 1978, pp. 2-3.)

The committees also invited citizens, educators, and concerned education-related groups to send written comments to the committee. Eighty-eight individuals and groups submitted written testimony, including most of the state's educational interest groups.

In its report to the legislature the committee did not make a specific recommendation concerning a state minimum competency requirement. It reviewed the information it had collected and noted the basic issues and concerns that had been raised in that process. The report set forth what it identified as appropriate objectives for a state minimum competency program, recommended a vehicle through which such a program might be developed, and offered some general guidelines for developing a program. The basic recommendations were:

> The purpose of an Ohio minimum competency program should be to improve the instruction and achievement of students through the use of tests for diagnosis of learning problems and planned intervention for individual students.
>
> The Assessment Advisory Committee believes the concerns of the legislature for improving student minimum competencies in the areas of reading, mathematics and English compositions can best be achieved by a thorough revision of the Minimum Standards for Ohio Elementary, Junior High and High Schools, particularly as they apply to the areas of primary reading, junior high mathematics and high school composition. Such effort would mandate that specific curriculum requirements be established in these areas with minimum skills to be mastered clearly stated.
>
> Adequate state funds should be allocated to the State Board of Education for the revision of minimum standards to include a minimum competency program; for providing technical assistance to local districts to implement the competency requirements; and for monitoring and enforcing the minimum standards.
>
> Implementation and enforcement of the revised standards in the skill areas, particularly the requirement for intervention programs in the areas of primary reading, junior high mathematics and reading composition, and high school mathematics and composition, should be contingent upon an adequate categorical allocation to local school districts. ("Report and Recommendations on Minimum Competencies,", p. 15.)

In addition the Committee report stated that "the Committee reaffirms its resolution adopted at the April 20-21, 1978 meeting:

> ...as a result of their review of the 1977 assessment results and the public testimony of citizens, educators and representatives of educational organizations gathered in 13 regional public forums, no mandated minimum competency testing should be implemented as a prerequisite for promotion to grades 5 and 9 and for graduation.
>
> and further, the Committee is opposed to the use

> of any state mandated test as a final determination for promotion or graduation. (Report and Recommendations on Minimum Competencies," p. 16.)

This report is quoted at length here because it states the set of compromises worked out by the representatives of the major parties involved in state educational policy making. For the most part, these concepts were incorporated in the requirement adopted by the State Board of Education four and a half years later. The recommendation that the issue of minimum competency testing be determined in the context of a more comprehensive revision of the state minimum standards was followed.

With future consideration of minimum competency testing placed in the revision of minimum standards the issue was taken out of the hands of the legislature and placed under the control of the State Board of Education and the Department of Education. This was an objective of the Department.

The recommendations emphasized that the objectives of a competency testing programs should be the diagnosis of learning problems and planned intervention for individual students -- not school or teacher evaluation and accountability. This was a victory for the teachers and their allies in the legislature who opposed an accountability oriented testing programs but favored an emphasis on and greater funding for student diagnosis and remediation. The committee stated a preference for locally determined procedures. The choice of a decentralized and non-intrusive mandate became part of the final requirement. This was a victory for local school boards and administrators who wanted to preserve local control. It also reflected the strong sentiment within the State Department of Education against a common test that would permit direct inter-district comparisons. Strong opposition to the use of a state mandated test as a prerequisite for promotion or graduation was also expressed in the report.

Another important feature of the recommendations are the references to the need for adequate financial support. The need for the state to appropriate money for the development, implementation, and oversight of such a program is clearly stated. The report recommended that a minimum competency testing program should not divert either state or local funds from existing basic instructional programs of the schools.

The tie between a competency program and additional state funding was a key component of the debate on minimum competency testing in Ohio. Local districts and teacher organizations were not prepared to accept a new state mandated program unless the state was prepared to pay for it with additional funding. Some supportors within the legislature would not support a competency program because they did not think that state was in a position to provide the additional funding required for such a program.

For the most part the understandings agreed to in the report constitute the basis for the program subsequently adopted. Representation from the legislature, the state

Board and Department of Education, and the major educational interest groups were involved in their formulation. Those in the legislature who wanted a state wide test emphasizing accountability had not gotten their way. Many of them felt they had been outmaneuvered by the State Department. The State Department of Education had gained control over the decision-making process. Local districts opposed to a program with a state wide test found comfort in the recommendations to leave considerable descretion in their hands. Teacher and administrator groups opposed to accountability oriented testing and who wanted to assure adequate and additional funding for any program enacted found their interests included.

It was the hope of state education leaders that this report would forestall additional efforts in the legislature to enact a state testing mandate. This was not the case. 1979 saw three different bills on minimum competency testing introduced in the lower house. Two of these did not get out of committee. Fearing that one of the other bills might get to the floor in one way or another, the Chairman of the House Education Committee put together a bill that followed the general recommendations of the competencies committees. It provided for locally developed tests with considerable state assistance, did not require passage of tests as a prerequisite for graduation and promotion, provided funding for remediation, and prohibited the use of the tests for evaluation of teachers or comparisons of school districts. The Chairman claimed he had all parties lined up in support of the bill.

The bill was voted out of the committee but never brought up for a vote on the floor. It is not entirely clear why the bill was withdrawn from consideration, when it was almost certain to have passed. The most likely explanation is that the implementation of such a program would have cost a great deal of money. Given the financial considition of the state it is not likely that such funding would be forthcoming. Again, the proponents of a firm state minimum competency testing mandate thought they had been outmaneuvered.

D. Adoption of A Requirement.

As stated above, the State Board of Education finally adopted a minimum competency requirement in December of 1982 as part of the revision of the State's Minimum Standards. The revisions were developed over a period of months. Public hearings were held in various parts of the state. For reasons we suggested above, the provisions dealing with competency testing and education did not elicit much discussion or controversy.

The adoption of the vague requirement has not curtailed interest in further state action on minimum competency testing. As with many policies the meaning and impact of the mandate depends on how it is interpreted, administered, and enforced by those charged with implementation. The extent and substance of implementation is particularly crucial for a mandate as vaguely worded as the Ohio competency program requirement. Different parties expressed varying expectations about whether the provisions would be enforced in any meaningful way. Those at the state department of education argued that the requirements would be implemented and committees were put together to formulate guidelines and interpretations. However, some who are supportive of a stronger state requirement anticipated little serious attempt to implement a meaningful requirement. They saw the adoption as a further instance in which the Department of Education had out maneuvered them and diverted the pressure for an accountability oriented program with a rather meaningless requirement. On the other hand, some of those who wanted a comprehensive competency program which emphasized student diagnosis and remediation saw the 1982 adoption as a first step, a holding action until state financial conditions would permit a more extensive program.

Discussions and proposals continued. In the 1983 session of the legislature one of the strong proponents of an accountability type test requirement introduced new legislation for a state test. It did not get very far but indicated a continuing interest in the issue. In his 1984 State of the State Message the governor called for the development of a more comprehensive competency program with an emphasis upon remediation of individual students as part of a general effort to improve the schools. Sentiment for this type of action was also supported by the Democratic leadership in the House Education Committee.

E. Explanations of Ohio Response.

We have described the protracted process through which Ohio education decision makers considered minimum competency testing and other measures of school accountability. We address more specifically the questions of why Ohio action was so late and why the mandate adopted leaves so much descretion to local districts and offers little explicit state direction.

Several factors help explain how and why educational policy makers resisted so long the pressure to enact a state mandate, even in the face of considerable interest and pressure; and why a decentralized, non intrusive measure was adopted.

1. Though the pressure for a state requirement was apparent in the legislature, positions on appropriate response divided three ways. First, there were those who wanted a strong accountability type state competency test. Second, there were some who thought no action on competency testing was desireable. Third, there were those who favored a competency testing program that emphasized diagnosis and remediation rather than accountability and opposed a program that emphasized the test as a "final hurdle." Those in leadership positions, especially in the Democratic controled lower house reflect the third sentiment. They were in positions to curtail efforts to adopt a state test program that emphasized accountability. However, they had to accept the fact that there was not money available for the type of diagnosis and remediation program they prefered.

2. Leadership within the State Department of Education

was strongly opposed to an intrusive state test program, and they were particularly opposed to any type of program that would permit inter-district comparisons. As the above description suggests leaders in the Department were in a position to exert their will and to first curtail and then divert the pressure for a state test requirement. The Department and State Board of Education are constituted independent of both the legislature and the governor. They were in a position to assert their position and fight for it. The record suggests that they were adroit at political manuevering. To some extent the battles were over turf and perogatives and the Department fought hard to defend its traditional preeminance over education policy. It had independence and the resources to win many of the battles.

3. Most of the organized educational interest groups were opposed to a state test requirement and there was almost no organized group pressure in favor of a strong state competency testing mandate. Though they were not always allied on education policy and and had different reasons for opposing a state test requirement, the Ohio Educational Association, The Buckeye Association of School Administrators, and the Ohio School Board Association all opposed an accountability oriented state test requirement. These groups were well organized and had strong allies in the legislature and the State Department of Education. The Ohio Education Association had strong ties to the Democratic leadership in the legislature and allies in the education committees. The associations for school boards and school

administrators had close ties with the State Department of Education. Moreover, the process through which education policies were considered provided interest group leaders with clear opportunities to represent their interests.

4. A fourth factor that curtailed Ohio adoption of a state competency testing requirement was the fact that through most of the 1970's Ohio government was confronted with recurring financial crises and revenue shortfalls. Ohio public school districts were hit hard by these financial difficulties and the state was often pressed to meet its basic obligations for school support. This had two implications for minimum competency legislation. First, it meant that the focus of legislative attention was on providing sufficient funding to keep the schools going. Second, since in Ohio the acceptance of a state requirement for competency testing was tied closely to sufficient additional funding, some potential legislative supporters realized that funding necessary for a good program was not available. This issue was noted by a number of state level education policy makers.

The reasons for the adoption of a vague relatively non-instrusive measure are, of course, related to the factors delaying the adoption of any policy.

5. The measure adopted was a compromise among those who wanted a strong state test requirement, those who wanted nothing and those who wanted a diagnosis and remediation oriented program. It was acceptable because it involved doing something, but not very much.

6. There was a strong tradition of local autonomy among Ohio school districts. The state structure of educational governance reflected and perpetuated attention to local perogatives. The members of the state school board were elected in their own local districts, independent of other statewide offices. Leadership personnel within the department were drawn almost inevitably from local district superintendencies and thus had close ties with local school administrators and their organizations.

7. Ohio has a number of large metropolitan areas, and leaders of central city school districts were opposed to any statewide test that might permit the performance of their students to be compared with either other cities or suburban districts. These concerns were represented within the State Department of Education.

These factors helped to shape the state level response to the public pressure for school accountability and the minimum competency testing movement in Ohio. In this context some local school districts in the state developed their own competency testing program. In one of the Ohio cases used in our study the local adoption was motiviated in part by anaticipation that the state might require a test program.

X. THE OHIO CASES

Two competency testing programs and four Ohio school districts were used in the case studies. Unlike Missouri, Ohio had no state mandate on competency testing when the study began. Ohio was included in the study, in part, because in the absence of a state requirement we could look at competency testing programs that had been locally motivated and developed. The lack of a state requirement had two consequences for the design and content of the field research.

First, the Ohio districts were basically self selecting. Persons at the Ohio Department of Education who were monnitoring local district competency testing activities indicated that only a few of Ohio's more than 600 school districts were involved with competency testing programs. Even fewer had fully developed programs. After reviewing the possibilities, we chose two locations with secondary level minimum competency tests covering a range of basic academic and life skills in place. One is a relatively large surburban district, located in one of the state's major metropolitan areas. The other is a set of three small rural districts which are administering a jointly developed program. In each district a set of 10th grade tests must be passed as a requirement for high school graduation.

The second consequence of using districts with self initiated programs is the need to ask why and how the districts decided to develop competency testing programs. The issue of why particular districts developed programs without an external requirement is interesting in its own right. The issue is also important for understanding the dynamics of program implementation and impact. In the field research we inquired into the factors giving rise to local programs.

The Ohio choices proved good ones. In each of the districts administrators took an interest in the project and cooperated with us in carying it out. In addition to their willingness to talk with us about test development and impact each of the districts had available extensive written records on the development and implementation of its testing program. More importantly, the use of these two cases permit us to analyze program impacts in two very different settings.

One case, the Bethesda City School District, is a comparatively large district serving several suburban communities in one of the state's largest metropolitan areas. The other includes three small local school districts serving rural/small town areas in the north central part of the state. The three small districts are located a considerable distance from any of the state's major urban areas. Under the leadership of the county school office they developed together a competency based education program. The common program is being implemented in each of the districts. The student population of the larger suburban district is more than twice that of the three rural districts combined.

In each of the two casea a particular program had been developed to address locally defined goals and needs. Administrators in each location stressed that their program had been shaped to local needs and resources, and it was not necessarily applicable to the needs of any other district.

One of the most significant contrasts between the two Ohio cases is the level of resources available and used in program development and implementation. During the late 1970's the Bethesda City School District enjoyed substantial revenue surpluses -- a rare condition among Ohio districts. Considerable money and personnel were available for allocation to its competency program. Most of the teachers and administrators we talked with in the Bethesda District acknowledged that a great deal of money had been spent on the program. The availability of money and the way it was allocated played a role in the acceptance of the program by teachers and staff.

The three small Taylor County Districts developed their program with a very limited budget. Their individual resource bases were smaller than that of the Bethesda district. In addition, the political climate put considerable constraints on what school officials were willing to spend on the program. In Bethesda the availability of money meant the district could allocate considerable resources to its competencies program without jeopordizing funding for other programs. This helped make the program acceptable to those who might have had more interest in other programs. In Taylor County the program initiators worked to minimize costs to avoid potential opposition. They saw program cost, not program content or impact, as the major potential problem in gaining support from the local school boards and their constituencies.

In describing and analyzing these two cases we follow this format: (1) description of districts; (2) description of the program and its objectives; (3) the impetus for the program; (4) the process of program development; (5) program administration and implementation; (6) the impact of the program on school programs teacher responses and evaluations of it; (7) summary observations on the program and its impact.

The Taylor County districts are treated as a single case with respect to the description and development of the program. With respect to implementation, impact, and teacher response the districts are sometimes considered separately and sometimes together. This format reflects both the nature of the program and the organization of our research. The three districts are implementing the same program. They worked together in determining its goals and content. On the other hand, some components of implementation such as remediation and the consequences of that implementation took pace within the individual districts. Local administrators and high school teachers were talked with separately and asked about impact in their own schools.

XI. The Taylor County Districts.

A. The Districts and Their Setting.

The Taylor County case involves three small local school districts which have worked together, under the leadership of the county board office, to develop a competency based education program. The three districts serve rural and small town areas in Northcentral Ohio.

Each of the districts is what Ohio law refers to as a "local district." As such they are part of the Taylor County School System. Ohio law specifies three types of school districts: (1) city districts; (2) exempted village districts; and (3) local districts. For the most part, the cities and larger towns have city or exempted village districts. These districts are independent of the county boards. Most rural areas and small towns are served by local districts which are tied administratively to a county school board. Though largely independent, the local districts rely on the county board and office for some administrative, reporting, accounting, and review activities. The county office provides resources and guidance to the local districts. Some state programs are administered through the county offices.

Taylor County, with a population of about 50,000 has six school districts. Each of the three larger towns has its own "city" or "exempted village" district. Most of the rest of the county is served by one of the three "local" districts which together constitute the Taylor County School System. The city and exempted village districts are not part of the county district and were not participating in the competency based education program.

Taylor County is located in Northcentral Ohio. It is not part of, nor close to, any of the state's major metropolitan areas. Like other counties in that part of the state Taylor County has a mixed agriculture and industrial economy. Industry is important in the county. At the time of the study unemployment was a major concern in Taylor County. The northern part of Ohio was hit particularly hard by the recession in 1982-83.

Like much of the surrounding area the political climate of Taylor County is conservative -- especially with respect to taxes, public spending, and government activity. Local independence and a dislike of outside interference are strong sentiments. The conservative, frugal, and anti-government sentiments were cited by many of the school people we talked with. Raising money to support the schools was problematic. A few years earlier the schools in one of the districts had been closed for some time because of the inability of the district to get voter support for a school tax levy.

This conservative political climate affected the care with which school officials and the citizen's committee developed and sold the competency program. On the one hand, it dictated a concern with keeping costs down. On the other hand, the sentiment against outside interference was used in getting local support for the program. Proponants argued that if the local schools did not develop a program of their own, they were likely to have one forced on them by the state.

There is little in its past to predict that the Taylor County local schools would be among the Ohio innovators in the area of competency testing. Local school officials took considerable pride in the fact that, on their own and with little money, they had put together an innovative program -- one that districts in other parts of the state were paying attention to. A sense that they had done the unexpected seemed to accompany the sense of pride. This local pride is a part of the positive feelings many teachers had about the program.

The three districts involved in the competency program are Cardinal Central, General Taylor, and Winchester. Cardinal Central includes the northeastern part of Taylor County. It is the smallest of the three districts in terms of student population and has the lowest tax base and per pupil expenditures. In the 1980-81 school year its average daily membership was 758, ranking it 555 out of the 615 school districts in the state.

The Gen. Taylor Local District is located in the south central part of the county. With 1,316 average daily members it ranked 421st in the state. The location of industry within its boundaries gives it the strongest tax base, and it ranked first among the three districts in per pupil expenditures.

Winchester Local District includes the western part of the county. With 1,344 average daily members it is slightly larger than Gen. Taylor.

Many of the students come from farm and factory worker families. College bound students are in the minority. A good number of juniors and seniors in each of the high schools leave their local school to attend the regional vocational school. The proportion is highest in Cardinal Central where about half of the juniors and seniors are at the vocational school. School administrators were concerned with declining enrollment and its impact on staff and school programs, and with having to implement the state's new minimum requirements.

Sports are a strong focus in the three districts -- particularly basketball. Our field work was carried out at the end of the basketball season and teams from two of the district were serious contenders for state championship in their division. In various ways teachers and administrators acknowledged the predominant role of sports and the importance of the teams to public perceptions and support of the schools.

Administrators felt their schools were performing better than average and that their constituents were satisfied with the education provided. Neither teachers nor administrators noted areas of serious conflict or discontent between the schools and their publics. A lack of concern about academic matters among school both board members and the general public was noted by several of the school people we talked with.

B. The Competency Program.

STAR BASE is the name given to the Taylor County program. The title is an acronym for Skill Testing and Remediation for Better Academic and Social Education. STAR BASE is a competency based education program; not simply a minimum competency test program. Minimum competency testing is only a part of a more comprehensive program. The high school test, which we focus on, is only one part of a curriculum, testing, and remediation program covering the entire twelve years.

The county level administrator who played the lead role in developing the program described it as a "bottom-up" program, in contrast to the "top-down" approach which characterizes many competency testing efforts. He used the term to indicate that the program by design started at the lowest level -- spelling out education objectives, designing curricula to meet those objectives, testing students to see if objectives were being met, and using test results to evaluate the curriculum and to offer assistance to individual students. This format contrasts with many competency testing programs which focus on the last of the school years, testing students close to high school graduation and offering remediation only at that point.

The STAR BASE program involves testing at grades 3, 5, 7, and 10. The basic skills indentified for inclusion in the tests are: math, language, reading/life skills, science and social studies. Reading is included in the 3rd, 5th, and 7th grade tests. Life-skills replaces reading in the 10th grade test. At the time of the study the science and social studies components of the 10th grade test had not been developed. The 3rd, 5th, and 7th grade tests are for disgnostic purposes only. They do not affect student grade advancement.

The passing of the 10th grade test is required for high school graduation. The decision to place this test at the second semester of the sophomore year was based on several factors. First, they wanted it close enough to the end of high school to constitute a relevant graduation requirement. Second, they wanted to give the test before many of the students left to spend their junior and senior years at the vocational school. Third, they wanted adequate time to offer remediation to students who failed to pass the test in the sophomore year.

Since our focus was upon secondary level competency testing we did not look at the development and administration of the lower level test and curriculum. We did learn from talking with school officials that the lower level remedial programs and curriculum review had not been fully implemented. The implementation focus had been on the 10th grade test because of its consequences for graduation. There was considerable concern about the administration of the test and what was done with students who failed to pass it. From observing what had happened in other states Taylor County officials were concerned about potential legal jeopardy which might stem from denying graduation to a student who had not passed the test. The legal issues stemming from the Florida competency test had a strong impact on Taylor County school officials.

The 10th grade test is given in March of each year. It is designed on Rasch Item Calibration method. Each subject area is a separte test of 40 to 50 multiple choice items. The test was developed by a Los Angeles firm to meet the objetives presented to it by the Taylor County schools. The same test is used each year and it is retaken by students who fail to pass it.

Students need to get a score of 70% or better to pass. Students are judged in each of the three subject areas. They must pass in each area. If they fail in a particular area they must retake the test in that area. Opportunities to retake the test are fairly open. The regulations specifiy that, "Retakes occur at the end of special remedial courses or on yearly intervals, as determined by local remediation procedures." However, in practice test retakes seem to be scheduled to meet the needs of individual students.

Special regulations apply to special education progra students. At the 3rd, 5th, and 7th grades they take the same tests as other students, "unless they are excused for reasons of best interest to the child." At the 10th grade students identified and placed in a special education program, "will be given a series of tests developed especially for them." Special education students who have failed to pass the test at the time of graduation may petition for a review by a committee made up of the Local Superintendent, the County Superintendent, and the special Education Supervisor. That committee will decide, "if the facts are such that the pupil will graduate with his/her class." (STAR BASE: Governing Mannual).

Remediation is left to the local school districts, and practices differ. The official manual on the program say little with respect to this component of the program.

The STAR BASE program also includes a high school honors program. The development of this program reflects concern with providing adequate challenge and interest for better high school students. This was one of the concerns motivating the development of the program.

The general goals of the program are stated in the STAR BASE manual as:

> 1. Enable us to determine individual student weaknesses in basic skills more accurately at various stages
> 2. Enable us to develop curriculum and methods designed to help alleviate weak areas in basic skills.
> 3. Enable us to be confident that we have done our best to see that our lowest achieving graduates have mastered enough basic skills to get along in society.
>
> (STAR BASE: Governing Manual)

These three goals reflect the three general objectives or purposes for which competency testing is used or justified -- individual student evaluation and remediation, curriculum evaluation, and school accountability. Most of the teachers saw student assessment and remediation as the most important objective of the program. Some of the administrators saw curriculum development, evaluation, and rationalization as an important goal. The accountability aspect of the program was not viewed as very important either in motivating the program or justifying its use.

The manual goes on to list ten "Program Objectives":

1. Meet legislative requirements.
2. Demonstrate accountability for our actions and programs.
3. Improve our relationships with the public.
4. Create more continuity in curriculum development.
5. Unify efforts in special and remedial areas.
6. Help identify areas of weakness in our schools and children
7. Improve and stimulate motivation for excellence from parents.
8. Develop more cooperation between levels and between teachers.
9. Improve schools' positions on social passage and graduation requirements.
10. Allow gifted students a channel for excellence not now available on the high school level.

It is interesting that "meet legislative requirements" is placed first. At the time of program adoption there was no legislative requirement. However, at that time there was an anticipate, (or fear) that a requirement might be passed. The anticipation that the district might be forced to use competency testing was used by program proponents to convince local school staff and the publics that they should enact their program.

Nearly half of the objectives deal with curriculum coordination and cooperation within and among the several county districts. Both intra and inter-district coordination were goals sought by those who initiated the local program.

C. Impetus for Program.

In the preceding section we described the program and its goals. Here we turn to the question of what motivated the Taylor County schools to develop their program. Our discussions with school administrators and teachers, and our reading of the written materials on STAR BASE suggest four factors are important in understanding why the program was developed. (1) The impetus came from the concerns of school leaders; (2) The program was not motivated by community pressure or parental concerns; (3) Forces outside the district helped to motivate and justify the development; and, (4) The leadership of one individual in the county office was crucial.

1. Concerns of Teachers and Administrators.

Initiation of the program came from within the schools. The interest in a competency program seems to have arisen as a response by county and local school leaders to concerns and dissatisfactions concerning the education they were providing their students. Their concerns were about students not reading and writing well, about problems of discipline, about the meaning of the high school diploma if virtually everyone could get one, about motivating seniors and better students. These concerns seem to have arisen from their own experiences and observations -- seeing students in upper grades who had difficulties with reading, seeing student with few apparent academic or life skills graduating with the same diploma as high competent students, experienceing difficulties convincing students to learn things, when it was apparent they could graduate without the effort.

As they shared thee concerns with each others they began to look for ways to deal with them. Competency based education and minimum competency testing were adopted as vehicles for addressing these issues. Some of the administrators were also concerned about the lack of structure and clear objectives in the overall curriculum and saw competency based education as a means for bringing organization to the educational program. It was school leaders who set in motion the development of the program. They wanted a program to meet educational needs and goals which they had identified.

2. Absence of Community Pressure.

There is a negative side to the proposition that the impetus originated from school leaders. It was not initiated by community interest or pressure. Contrary to the popular interpreation of outsiders pushing minimum competency testing programs on reluctant school leaders, there was no evidence that community concerns about school performanced or pressure for school accountability played any role in motivating the development of STAR BASE.

We probed both administrators and teachers for some indication of community concern or pressure. County level, district level, and building administrators were unanimous in reporting a lack of pressure or even interest on the part of citizens, parents, or school boards with respect to school accountability measures. School officials saw the schools meeting community expectations. More generally, they saw little concern about academic programs among the public, or even school boards. Several administrators bluntly noted that school board members were more likely to show concern about the performance of the basketball team than the curriculum. Rather than acting reluctantly, under pressure, to adopt a program demanded by the public, school officials intersted in the program worked to convince school boards and the community that such a program was desirable and worth what it would cost.

3. Influences From Outside the District.

To say there was no community pressure for competency testing and that the impetus came from the school leaders is not to say that the motivation was based entirely within the local schools. The "competency movement" outside the district and even outside the state played a part in motivating and directing development of the STAR BASE program.

First, school officials were aware of what was happening in other parts of the country with respect to competency testing. They learned about programs in other states from attending professional conferences and from reading popular and educational publications. It is clear from talking with the major leaders behind STAR BASE that they were aware of the issues and controversies surrounding competency testing. Reports on what was happening elsewhere were a part of the early deliberations of the committee that developed STAR BASE. Taylor County school leaders were self consciously adapting the ideas and concepts of minimum competency testing and of competency based education to their own particularistic situation.

External interest in competency testing also affected this local effort in another way. 1978, the year the development of STAR BASE got underway, was the year controversy over a state wide test was most intense at the State level. Concern about a state test requirement was felt among educators in Taylor County. They were in communication with school officials in other parts of the state about the threat of a state test. They also communicated with state educational interest groups and with people at the state department of education about their opposition to a state test requirement.

Fear that the state might enact a state test was one of the factors motivating local officials to develop their testing program. There was strong sentiment against a state test requirement and a belief that one way to avoid an undesireable state imposed test was to develop their own program. Several of the local school officials noted the importance of this fear in motivating the local effort. More significantly, the local leaders used the prospect of a state requirement as a tool for convincing teachers, school boards and the public to go along with the local program.

4. Leadership.

Another important factor in understanding the development of the Taylor County program is the leadership of one individual on the staff of the county board office.

The assistant superintendent at the county office played a crucial role in initiating and directing the development of the program. It is unlikely that the STAR BASE program would have been developed in his absence. Though he was not the only important actor, his interest, dedication, persistance, and organizational skill got the process started and kept it on track. From the time he moved to the county office from a teaching position in the Gen. Taylor District in 1978 until he left the county in 1983 he devoted a considerable portion of his time and attention to STAR BASE.

His predecessor at the county office played an important role in bringing information about competency testing to the area and the superintendent of the Gen. Taylor district was important in articulating and pushing the local concerns that led to the competency based education program, but the assistant superintendent in the county office was key putting the effort together and holding it together during the incubation, planning, development, and implementation stages. He acted with determination and deliberation. He demonstrated a good sense of the particular context in which he was operating and skill in involving teachers, citizens, and students in the process.

Both internal and external factors contributed to the development of STAR BASE. School officials developed and articulated a set of concerns about their schools and turned to competency based education as a way to address their concerns. The national competency testing movement and the fear that the state might act if they did not served as an added impetus. The key participant from the County office summarized the motivations behind the program in this way: "To some extent they were external; someone else is likely to make us do something eventually; and more important internal -- as an opportunity to do something that they would find desireable locally." He stressed that he and his colleagues sought to take advantage of "the energy directed at minimum competency testing" to do some productive things in their districts.

They sought more cooperation among the three local districts; a more comprehensive and systematic curriculum; ways to motivate students to improve their academic performance and to test their effectiveness. Contrary to the general interpretation of the competency movement they did not act in response to local public dissatisfaction and demands for accountability. They decided to address problems which they had identified. They devoted considerable effort to convincing their publics that they should use the STAR BASE program to address them.

D. Program Development.

The STAR BASE program was developed over a two and a half year period, beginning with informal conversations among county and district administrators in the spring of 1978. The basic program was formally adopted by the several school boards in the fall of 1980. During that period numerous people had opportunities to participate in the process of determining to have a competency program, deciding on program form and content, and giving legitimacy to the program decided upon.

Four general points are important in understanding the development and acceptance of the program:

First, the initiation of the program and the push for its adoption came from within the schools. This point is stated clearly in the introduction to the report of the joint educator and citizen steering committee.

> This project has grown from the concerns of teachers and administrators who have become somewhat alarmed by certain trends and practices which have been occurring in our local schools and accross America. In an effort to find solutions to some of our problems, we have taken a look at the Competency Based Education (C.B.E.) movement, and have recognized the fact that, properly handled, C.B.E.a could be a tool in our efforts to improve our schools. ("STAR BASE: Project Manual", No. 1., p. 15)

School leaders had determined that a competency program was desireable. They set out systematically to convince others to go along with the idea and involved relevant parties in defining and developing the program. The school leaders set the agenda. A crucial part of the development entailed building support and acceptance.

Second, numerous people were involved in the process of defining objectives, determining procedures, designing program content and format, and legitimizing STAR BASE. The numbers and types of people involved was expanded sequentially from superintendents to principals, to school boards, to teacher and citizen representatives, to teachers, students, and parents. Great care was taken to touch base with the crucial parties such as school boards and teachers at very early points in the process. Much of the work of defining the program and laying out its basic content was done by a joint committee of educators and citizens,The Taylor County Steering Committee on Competency Based Education. Student representatives were involved in committees which worked out the tests, and a student competition was held to design a logo for the program. An assessment questionnaire was used to provide an opportunity for students, teachers, and parents to respond to the ideas of a competency program and to help determine its content. The media and presentations at meetings of church groups, schools, and civic organizations were used to inform the larger public about what was going on.

Program initiators devoted considerable effort to get people involved in the process. The county office administrator who played the lead role, stressed the importance of grass roots support and involvement. He feels the sense of involvement in developing a LOCAL program to meet LOCAL NEEDS was extremely important for the program. In his opinion the sense of "ownership" that came from this process is one of the major strengths of the STAR BASE program.

The involvement of teachers in all stages of program definition and development contributed to the generally positive evaluations teachers had of the program. We found no sense among teachers that a program had been forced upon them against their will or without there having opportunities for input.

Third, though many people were involved in program development and legitimization of the program, one of administrators at the county office exerted considerable control over the entire process. Early in the process it was determined that the county office staff would do the major administrative work on the program. Communications were channeled through that office. All publicity and relationships with the media were done exclusively through that office. Agendas for meetings, reports on meetings, and presentations on activities and decisions were done by the assistant superintentent in the county office. He drafted the 40 page a report of the Steering Committee and most of the other documents. He played the major role in laying out the game plan for developing STAR BASE and in orchestrating the process. He devoted considerable attention to the details of getting others involved and in touching base with relevant parties.

Fourth, there was not much opposition to the program -- among teachers, school board members, or other in the several school districts. None was identified by program leaders. None of the teachers and other administrators we talked with mentioned opposition to the program. The major apprehensions of program leaders had to do with program costs rather than program content or procedures. Their major effort was directed toward convincing the school boards and others that the program would not be very costly and that the benefits were worth whatever costs there were.

The first official step in developing STAR BASE was a meeting of the superintendents and principals of the three districts on April 19, 1978. Item III on the agenda of that meeting was,, "Beginning a Competency Based Education Direction in Taylor County." Several important points were agreed to at that meeting:

1. The county office would bear the cost of program development as long as the amount was bearable.
2. Three lay persons from each of the districts would be selected to serve on a citizens' committee to provide input.
3. A steering committee of teachers would be selected to direct the total operation under the leadership of the county office staff. (see, "STAR BASE: Project Manual, No. 1.")

The next step was a meeting of school board members from each of the districts on June 1. This meeting was open to the public and the press. Competency Based Education was the sole item on the agenda. The purpose of this meeting was to explain competency based education and to begin to sell school board members and the public on the need for a local program.

The district superintendents made a decision to set up a steering committee to oversee the development of the program. The committee was to be composed of three community representatives and three teacher representatives from each of the three districts. That committee held five days of meetings August 7 to 11, 1978. The commitee issued a report which included a philosophy of education for the Taylor County Schools, a plan and schedule for future action on a competency program, and a plan for competency testing and related procedures and guidelines. Since the "Plans for Future Action" part of that report constitutes a concise statment of the structure and processing of program development and adoption it is presented here in its entirity:

PLANS FOR FUTURE ACTION

Developed By Community and Educators Committee

I. Publish a packet of materials containing the results of the meetings held August 7 - 11, 1978.

II. Explain packet of materials and the committee's recommendations.

A. To County School Board Members (Aug. 15, 1978)
B. To Local Superintendents (Aug. 22, 1978)
C. To Local School Board Members (by Oct. 30, 1978)
1. Information will be presented by County Office Personnel.
2. Steering committee members from the district will be present to provide support and

answer questions.

D. To teachers and administrators at Fall Inservice (Oct. 6, 1978).

E. To the general public:

1. News releases to radio and newspapers (by Aug. 21, 1978 and throughout the process)

2. At Parent-Teacher Organization Meetings, etc. (throughout the entire process)

3. Radio Talk Shows (throughout the process)

III. The initial committee members will remain as a steering committee for the duration of the study.

A. As other committees are formed, at least one member of the steering committee will serve on the committees.

B. Transition will be smoother if members from the original committee serve on other committees throughout the process.

IV. Implementation of Competency Testing and Graduation Requirements.

A. Committee will develop minimum competency guidelines for each basic subject area (by Jan., 1980)*

B. Committee will develop test questions relating to these minimum competency guidelines (by Jan., 1980)*

C. Pilot implementation of tests in one school district. (spring 1980)*

1. To determine problems.

2. To provide for refinement of tests.

D. Board approval for implementation of tests and graduation requirements.

E. Full implementation of tests and graduation requirements in all three local districts. (1980-81)*

F. Committee will develop plan for student remediation. (1980-81)*

G. Plan for student remediation will be implemented (1980-81)*

H. 1st Graduating class affected by Honors Program. (1985).

("STAR BASE: Project Manual, No. 1, p. 19.)

In general these procedures and schedules were followed over the next two years. Teachers, students, and parents were involved in all phases of the development. The school districts contracted with a Los Angeles firm to develop the actual tests, based on the specific objectives supplied by the committee. The tests for special education students were developed locally. An important deviation from the plan was the leaving of student remediation to local districts.

E. Implementation and Administration

The 1982-83 school year in which our study was conducted was the third year for the tenth grade test. It was the first year in which seniors were required to have passed the test in order to graduate. At that point the STAR BASE program was short of full implementation. Only the examinations in math, laguage, and life skills components of the tenth grade test had been developed. Tests in science and social studies were scheduled to be developed by the following year, but it was clear that they would not be ready at that point.

The program of tests and remediation for the earlier grades was less fully implemented. Administrators had concentrated on implementing the tenth grade test and the remediation connected with it, because of the high school graduation requirement. They were concerned about legal ramifications that could arise if any student was denied graduation because of failure to pass the test. Several of the administrators reported that they fully expected law suits to arise from the high school graduation requirement.

The short period of time the test program had been in place the fact that the program was not yet fully implemented should be kept in mind as we discuss its impact. Many of those we interviewed cautioned us that it was too early to see all of the impact that the test program would have. There are two basic components to the high test program: the test itself and the remediation that followed it. Little systematic attention was given to preparing students for the test in the period immediately proceding the test.

1. Administration of 10th Grade Test.

The tenth grade test is given to sophomores in March of each year. The tests in each of the three subject areas are given to all of the tenth graders in mass at their respective high schools. The testing in each school takes two days, using 2-3 periods each day.

With respect to the tenth grade test the County Office administrator maintains strict control over the testing. He sets up the testing scheule and administers the tests at each of the high schools himself. Two months prior to the test date he visits each sophomore english class to explain the test to the students. The county administrator himself keeps the copies of the tests and few others see the actual tests. Most of the teachers we interviewed commented that they had never seen actual copies of the test. The same level of control and central test administration is not exerted over the lower level testing. Local teachers and administrators administer those tests, which are solely for diagnostic purposes and carry no jeopardy.

Students must pass all the sub-tests in each of the three testing areas. Failure to pass a test in a particular area leads to some form of remediation and retaking the test. Depending upon the remediation program the student might be in a position to retake the test from 3 to 5 times between the first test in the spring of the sophomore year and high school graduation. In practice, given the small numbers of students involved and the variation in remediation programs, there appears to be great flexibility as to when retests are given. The County test administrator seems prepared to regive the test to any student when those working with his or her remediation think the student is ready. Special provisions are made for special education program and learning disability students and for students who transfer into the district after the second semester of the sophomore year. Since many students leave their local high school to attend the area vocational school starting in the eleventh grade, some of the remediation and retesting takes place at the vocational school. Each of the three local districts is part of the same joint vocational school district.

2. Reporting of Test Scores.

The tests are graded outside the district and returned to the county office. The county office maintains considerable control over the dissemination of test scores and information on the results.

The results of the testing are not received until May.

The scores for individual students are passed on to the several districts where they are reviewed by principals and guidance counselors. Each district determines how it will disseminate the results to students and parents and what remediation program will be used. The results are received too late for use until the beginning of the following school year. The scores are then kept by high school guidance counselors. They are available for use by teachers, but in practice they are used almost exclusively in connection with the remediation of students who fail to pass given aspects of the test.

The county office exerts strict control over what information about test scores gets communicated to the media and the public. Comparative data for the three districts is not compiled or disseminated. The County office make a concerted effort to avoid the public comparisons of the several schools. A decision was made early in the development of the program that there would be no public inter-district comparisons. Data would not be compiled and disseminated in ways making such analysis possible, and all public statements on over-all test results would be made by the county office.

The district superintendents were circumscribed in what information on test results they gave to their own school boards. Practices varied from district to district. One superintendent reported that no written reports on test results were made to the school board and that only very general oral reports were made.

As far as we could tell the data comparing performances of the several districts had not become public. We found no evidence that such issues had become public concerns as was the case in Missouri. Some school administrators suggested that the fact academic performance was not a top concern of the school boards and publics in most of the districts also helped keep inter-district comparisons from becoming a public concern.

3. Remediation.

STAR BASE policy left student remediation to the local districts. The districts determine whether and how remediation is provided. Each of the districts provides and required remedial activities for students who fail to pass any part of the test. In some instances it is done in special classes. In others special tutorial sessions are used. Districts have attempted to tie remediation with other special education programs, in part because these programs and staff are funded with outside money and it does not become an extra cost to the district.

Gen. Taylor offers remedial classes in reading and math. A semester remedial class is required for anyone failing one or more of the components of the test. The number of students requiring remediation are small (approximately 14 out 110 sophomores who took the test in 1982 failed at least a part of the test). Retesting is done at the end of each semester.

Winchester Local offers a more extensive remediation program, offering work in life skills as well as math and language arts. A semester course in basic math skills is offered for students failing the math test. Remediation in language arts and practical skills is in a year long program scheduled to meet three days a week. The practical skills remediation is handled by the DPPF tutor (Disadvantaged Pupil Performance Fund). Money from that fund is used to pay teachers. A remediation program using funds from this program was already there. That program is now used to handle remediation in the life skills component of the 10th grade test. Classes tend to be small with students meeting with teachers as their individual schedules permit. At the time of our interviews all students who had taken the remediation had passed the test the second time around.

Cardinal Central requires remediation for students who fail to pass any part of the test. It is handled by tutors with money coming from outside funded programs such as DPPF. Scheduling of times with the tutor is done to fit individual student programs. Tutors are available 5 to 6 periods a day and students schedule sessions when they have free periods. Generally only 2 to 4 students are involved at any given period.

Some form of remediation was offered in each of the three districts. Remediation was offered only after a student had failed the 10th grade test. To date little systematic individual remediation had been developed as part of the lower grade level tests. Several additional comments needs to be made with respect to remediation. All of the administrators we talked with and most of the teachers say the identification and correting of individual student weaknesses as the major objective of the STAR BASE program and talked about the importance of remediation. Each of the districts was trying to carry out remediation, but the small numbers of students involved and the limited resources available for remediation limited what was done. The districts were trying to pay for the remediation by overlapping responsibilities with personnel hired under other special programs funded by outside funds.

Those doing the remediation were attempting to develop special curricula and materials related to the STAR BASE test. They were among the few teachers who made use of individual student test results.

4. Program Costs.

As we pointed out before the Taylor County program was developed at little cost. The County Board and the three local districts had available and were willing to commit only limited resources to the program. They were limited in both the money and personnel they could allocate directly to the program.

The county administrator in charge of the test prepared for us a detailed accounting of both the direct and indirect costs of the STAR BASE PROGRAM for the five year period beginning in the summer of 1978 and going through the 1982-83 academic year. He estimates total cost for program development and administration to be $72,800. That includes both direct and indirect costs. More than half of the costs in that calculation is the one third of his regular salary. He officially allocated a third of his time to the program over that period. This, of course, does not represent any added cost to the county office or the local districts, but the allocation of his time at his regular salary.

Of the total $20,300 was paid to outsiders for the development of the test and the annual cost of scoring the tests in 1981, 1982, and 1983. The cost of scoring the tests in 1983 was $2.20 per student. The test development costs and the scoring costs were apportioned to the local districts. $8,500 was spent on test and program development, most of which went to reimburse teachers for work on the program during the summer and to pay substitutes when teachers were released to work on the program and to attend committee meetings relevant for the program.

These figures do not include any of the student remediation. Those cost are born by the local districts and, as we pointed out above, these costs have been kept low by piggybacking remediation courses on to other special program staff and getting them paid from outside funds. Local district administrative costs were kept low too. One of the districts had stopped mailing reports on test results to parents because they did not have the resources to pay the postage and other costs to sent them out.

As we have pointed out before there was a concern from the beginning that the cost of the STAR BASE program would have to be kept down. This seems to have been the case.

The failure to fully implement the tenth grade test during the three years of operation resulted from the lack of funds to complete the development work. The development of the science and social science components of the 10th grade test had been delayed because money was not available to pay for test development. At the time we were in the County officials were hopeful that one or more of the city school districts located in the county would join the program and provide money to develop the remaining tests. Some of the administrators would like to have seen more funds available for more thorough and systematic remediation.

5. Teachers and The Test.

Two additional points need to be made about the relationships between teachers and the test. First, there was a strong norm articulated in the development of the program and communicated throughout the districts that teachers were not to teach to the test. This point was made by most of the administrators we talked with. They argued that the test was developed to reflect the curriculum and that it was not necessary or appropriate for teachers to orient their courses specifically to the test. Our interviews with teachers suggested that this point had been communicated to them. In response to the question whether they felt pressured to teach to the test, most replied in the negative. Many also commented that they had never seen the test and therefore were not in a position to teach to the test. Those teaching the remedial courses are an expection to this proposition.

Second, there was strong support for the proposition that teachers would not be judged or evaluated by the performance of students on the tests. Administrators articulated this as an important proposition. They argued that if this became the case the program would be destroyed. Few teachers interviewed in the Taylor County districts felt that they were being judge or evaluated by student performance on the test.

These two propositions were expressed often in our interviews and discussions in the Taylor County districts. The fact that they came up so often suggests that they had been discussed a lot and have become part of the normative structure surrounding the test.

F. Impact of Tenth Grade Competency Test.

What impact has the STAR BASE program, and particularly the tenth grade competency test had upon the Taylor County Schools. How has it affected the curriculum, teaching practices, the allocation of educational resources, and relationships between the schools and the public? How have teachers responded to the test program and how do they evaluate its impact?

In considering the impact of the STAR BASE Program several points should be kept in mind. First, the program had been in effect for only two years. All parts of the program had not yet been implemented. For example, the science and social studies parts of the test had not been developed. Second, it was probably too early to have a comprehensive picture of test program impact. Third, the tenth grade minimum competency test that we look at is only one component of a much more comprehensive program. However, the initial implementation emphasis and focus was placed on the high school level competency test.

1. Curriculum.

The 10th grade test has had only limited impact on the general secondary curriculum. Neither teachers nor administrators saw the test or the STAR BASE program having led to important changes in the curriculum; nor did they assume that the test should lead to substantial modifications. First, the test was developed to reflect the exisiting curriculum. The testing program had been designed to identify students who were having troubles with the curriculum and to provide them with remediation. In this respect the situation is very different from that in Missouri where an outside test was imposed on local districts and districts often had to adjust their curricula to reflect the test. Secondly, there was a very strong norm that teachers were not to teach toward the test.

The process of program development itself had contributed to formulating a more systematic rationale for the curriculum and objectives. The development process had entailed establishing over-all consensus on educational objectives and standards. Both teachers and administrators noted that the test had contributed to more curriculum standardization among the several districts. That impact was felt more at the elementary level.

Unlike several of the other programs and schools we looked at little systematic effort was directed toward preparing students specifically for the test. Though individual teachers seem to have adjusted some aspects of their courses to reflect better their understanding of the content of the test, there had been no over-all effort at curriculum revision. The fact that few students failed the test indicated to teachers and administrators that the curriculum objectives were being met. Teachers in the three districts were asked how well they thought the 10th grade test reflected the curriculum. Of the 19 teachers responding to this question only one responded that it did not fit very well. None indicated a "bad fit."

The most direct curricular impact of the test program was in the remediation programs for students who failed all or parts of the 10th grade test. In each of the districts remediation programs were expanded and altered. Teaching staff responsibilities were reassigned and courses or tutorial programs were developed specifically around the test and test objectives. The remediation programs affected only those students who had not passed the test. The basic curriculum and the programs for the majority of the students were not altered substantially by the tenth grade test.

2. Impact on Teaching.

Though the test program has not resulted in major changes in the curriculum some teachers, especially those dealing with lower level courses report some changes in focus and emphasis as a result of the test. English teachers report more emphasis on grammar and particular points such as pronouns and punctuation. Some of the math teachers report more emphasis on basics, franctions, and word programs. Rather than systematic alterations, it seems that teachers have responded to areas where they hear students have problems by placing more emphasis on those areas. The changes are primarily in the area of more emphasis upon certain basic skills and drills.

Except for those teachers doing the remediation teachers in the Taylro County districts did not identify particular blocks of time they spent preparing students for the tenth grade test. Nor did they see the test as making additional demands on them with respect to record keeping. For the most part teachers did not see the test encroaching upon their courses, their time, or their approaches to teaching. None of the Taylor County teachers interviewed reported feeling pressure to teach to the test. Only one of the nineteen teachers reported feeling that their performance as teachers was in any way based on how well his students did on the test. That teacher was involved in remediation and reported a positive response from the principal when all of his remedial students passed the test. Similarly only one of the nineteen teachers reported feeling that the tenth grade test has meant that he has "less say in what I teach in my own courses and when and how I teach particular materials."

In assessing the impact of the test on their own teaching none of the teachers reported a negative impact. The majority reported a positive impact with the others saying the impact had been "neutral" or that the test had had no impact. In the Taylor County districts one of the most common comments made by teachers in assessing the impact of the test program was that it helped them by specifying that students had to know certain things in order to graduate. It provided an easy answer to students who asked why they should learn the rules of using commas or pronouns. The teacher could respond that you have to know learn that in order to pass the test and to graduate from high school. As one teacher stated it: The test "strikes terror in the heart of my students and makes my job easier." Many of the teachers found it useful to have the test looming over the heads of students. It meant that there were particular things that had to be learned and that failure to learn them would have explicit consequences for the student.

Except for purposes of remediation the results of the tests were not used by teachers in diagnosing individual students or in self evaluation of their own courses. The test scores for each student were available in the offices of the guidence counselors. Few teachers, excepct those involved directly in individual remediation programs, made use of them. Administrators and guidence counselors reported that teachers seldom asked to see student test scores.

3. Allocation of Resources.

One of the concerns raised about competency testing is that it leads to the redirection of educational resources toward assuring very minimal accomplishmements of all and away from other educational objectives. This does not seem to be the case with the STAR BASE program for a number of reasons. First, the costs of program development and implementation were not very great. Even the remediation whose cost was born by the individual districts had cost little. For the most part the districts used exisiting staff, redefined existing courses or programs, and made use of outside special program funds to accomplish the remediation.

Second, the minimum competency test was only one component of a more comprehensive program. At the secondary level the emphasis upon assuring basic skills with special assistance for those who had problems in that area was balanced by the introduction of an honor's program for students with better than average academic skills. Third, the existence of the minimum competency test intruded very little upon the general educational program. The programs of most of the students was affected very little by the existence of the test. As pointed out above few adjustments or changes were made in the overall curriculum. With few students failing the test only a minority of the students or teachers were affected. Teaching responsibilities were not altered and even the remediation did not interfere very substantially with the general programs of those who failed the test.

Two questions were asked about the impact of the test on allocating emphasis and resources. Teachers were asked if they felt the test "has meant that school resources, such as money and time, have been diverted from other aspects of the curriculum and spent on STAR BASE related activities? If so, what have they been taken away from?" Fifteen of the nineteen teachers responded no to this question. One didn't know. Only one saw resources being diverted from important things. The second question asked if the test "has meant that we emphasize minimum educational achievement instead of other educational objectives in our curriculum." 14 of the 19 teachers (74%) disagreed with this proposition.

The implementation of the 10th grade minimum competency test seems not to have resulted in significant changes in either the use of resources or emphasis in the over all curriculum. It seems to have permited some focus on the assurance of basic skills and assistance to those with difficulties without disrupting other parts of the academic program.

4. The Test and The Public.

One of the general functions of minimum competency test programs is to serve as a means through which the schools can be held accountable to the public. By paying attention to test scores school boards and the general public can determine if the schools are adequately performing their educational functions and objectives. We have seen how the BEST served this role in some districts in Missouri. There is little to suggest that the STAR BASE program or the 10th grade test was designed for or that it performed this function. Neither teachers nor administrators saw the test as performing this accountability function. As part of our interviewing we asked both teachers and administrators which of the following was the single most important purpose served by the STAR BASE test:

a. As: A tool for evaluating and improving the curriculum?
b. As: A tool for diagnosing and remediating the particular problems of individual students?
c. As: A tool for evaluating the performance of the local schools and holding them accountable?

Everyone of the administrators and 18 of the 19 teachers interviewed chose "diagnosing and remediating the particular problems of individual students." One of the teachers chose "evaluating and improving the curriculum." None saw school evaluation and accountability as the major purpose of the program. Few of the personnel saw the test being used by the public to judge the performance of the schools. Nor did they see the school boards or the general public paying very much attention to how well the students did on the test. In responses to a question on how much attention the public paid to student test performance not one teacher said a great deal. Over half responded not very much or no attention.

These findings are consistent with points we made before about the impetus for the STAR BASE program coming from within the schools and not from the public or the school boards and the reports that school board members were not particularly concerned about student academic performance. School evaluation and accountability were neither the object behind the program nor a major function served by it.

5. Teacher Response and Evaluation.

By all of the mesaures we used to assess teacher reaction to the STAR BASE program and the 10th grade minimum competency test teachers accepted the program and regarded it favorably. All of the teachers interviewed favor keeping the program. All of them like having the passage of the test as a requirement for high school graduation. In response to the question how they would characterize the over all impact of the test on their school none of the teachers reported that the impact was negative. For the most part teachers felt that other teachers were well informed about the test, that the "right amount of time" was spent preparing students for the test and that teachers had been appropriately consulted in the development of the test.

All in all the teachers had few negative reactions or evaluations of the test. Several teachers suggested that the test was too easy and that more students passed the test than they had anticipated. In general teachers seemed to think it appropriate that students demonstrate they had acquired basic skills before they graduated. They felt the test helped motivate students and force them to take school more seriously. Many of them thought it useful to identify individual weaknesses and try to correct them. As was suggested above many of the teachers liked having the test so they could use it to force students to learn particular things.

The generally positive response of the teachers result from several factors. First, the teachers were brought into participation in the program formation and legitimation from a very early point. It was not developed without their participation and input. Second, at an early stage the norm was established that teachers would not be judged by test results and that they should not teach to the test. By the same token, publicity about the test and the reporting of test scores were to be handled in ways that the test results were not used for public evaluation of school performance and for neither teacher nor school comparisons. Thus, two of the factors that have been most theatening to teachers were deliberately avoided in the development and implementation of the STAR BASE program. Third, the cost of the test program in terms of money spent, ressources taken from other programs and objectives, and intrusion into other school activities and programs were very minimal. For the most part teachers did not have to alter their courses, change their teaching methods, and undertake new approaches in order to live with the new test program. While the costs were minimal most of the teachers could see some benefits in having the program.

G. Summary and Conclusions.

The Taylor County districts were successful in developing and selling to the staff and community a comprehensive competency based education program which included a 10th grade minimum competency test. Teachers and administrators down the line had accepted the program. For the most part they saw it having positive impacts on the schools. Great care had been taken to involve teachers, students, and other interested citizens in the design and legitimation of the program. The process of test development seems to have been an unusually successful effort at involving relevant publics in the process of institutionalizing major reforms and innovation. The administrator at the county office who oversaw this process should be credited with a major accomplishment.

Teachers, who have often opposed competency testing programs were convinced to accept and in many cases enthusiastically endorse the program. By avoiding inter-district comparisons, assuring teachers that they would not be judged by the test, and articulating the norm that teachers were not to "teach to the test" those responsible for the program were able to avoid three of the consequences teachers find most threatening in minimum competency testing.

The fact that the tenth grade competency test intruded little upon what teachers taught and how they conducted their courses also helped make the program acceptable to the teaching staff. Classroom experiences for both students and teachers were not changed very much by the introduction of the test program. The remediation courses were added but they affected only the minority of students who did not pass the test. The program had not led to new emphases nor the reallocation of resources. Relatively little money had been spent on the program.

Many of the teachers in the Taylor County districts liked the discipline, the focus, and the club provided by the tenth grade test and the related graduation requirement. They seemed to like having a structure and club they could use in motivating or coercing students into learning basic language and computation skills. A number of them stated they liked being able to tell students they had to learn specific skills because they were required to pass the test and the test had to be passed for graduation.

The Taylor County schools had not fully implemented even the tenth grade components of their program. Two of the five original areas of the test were not developed and at the time of the study the development of the science and social studies parts of the test was on hold. Lack of money seemed to be the major reason. Some of the administrators most involved in test development and implementation felt frustrated by the slow progress being made in implementing the full program. They also were concerned about the uneven quality of post test remediation. As the program was being developed a decision had been made to leave remediation up to local districts. As we pointed out above the form and comprehensiveness of remediation varied from district to district. For the most part the districts tried to handle remediation with exisiting resources. Some of those most closely involved in the development of the program wondered in retrospect if this had not been a mistake. The remediation, though considered a major component of the program was left pretty unspecified. After devoting so much attention to the conceptualization of the program, the development of the tests, and getting the program accepted in three different school districts it had been difficult to maintain the level of momentum and to find the money to fully implement the program.

Though a great deal had been accomplished in the Taylor County districts with very limited resources the lack of money and personnel took its toll in uneven and incomplete implementation. This problem was compounded by the fact that more funding and much of the implementation had to be done by three small local school districts, each of which was itself pressed for money and staff time.

One of the important benefits of the development of the

STAR BASE program was what it represented in inter-district cooperation. This was one of the first time the three districts had worked together on any project such as this. Better cooperation and coordination among the three districts had been one of the goals of those who originated the program. The fact that they had succeeded in this large scale undertaking was a major accomplishment and one that is likely to have future impact upon the schools. The development of the program also reprsented a larger and substantially different role for the county office. The administrative staff of the county school district played a major role in the development and implementation of STAR BASE.

XII. BETHESDA.

A. School District and Community.

The Bethesda City School District is a relatively large suburban school system, located in one of Ohio's largest metropolitan areas. The 1982-83 school enrollment of approximately 10,000 students makes it the largest of the seven districts used in the study. At the time of the study the district had two 10-12th grade high schools, each with approximately 1700 students. There were three junior high schools with grades 7 - 9, and thirteen k-6 elementary schools.

The Bethesda City School District serves three different suburbs; an older college town which has been absorbed into the metropolitan area and two newer suburbs. One of the new communities developed as the result of the building of a large automobile assembly plant. The resulting influx of factory workers and their families contributed to a substantial increase in students during the 1960's and to a more diversified student body.

In contrast to most school districts in Ohio the Bethesda City District went through the 1970's in a strong financial condition. The district enjoyed substantial revenue surpluses into the early 1980's. The surpluses resulted from the combination of a substantial local tax base, good planning, and firm financial management.

Automobile assembly plants and other industries located within the district contributed to the strong tax base for the schools.

Along with money the Bethesda district had substantial staff resources. The district had available, and was willing to commit, substantial staff time and monetary resources to the competencies program. The availability of money affected the content of the program, the process through which it was developed, and its reception by teachers and the community.

The Bethesda District is experiencing a substantial enrollment decline. The sharp decrease in the school age population was the most significant factor facing the Bethesda schools at the time of the study. The decline was affecting all aspects of the school system. Declining enrollment was not unique to Bethesda. However, two factors make the Bethesda decrease particularly significant. First, the decline was substantial. Between 1971 and 1980 enrollment had declined 35%. A continuing decline was projected through the 1980's. (DECLINING ENROLLMENT, Vol. 2,)

Second, the steep decline followed a period of sharp enrollment increase. In 1954 the district had six schools. By 1969 that number had increased to twenty-one. In the 1965-66 school year total enrollment was 14,980. Six years later it had increased to 17,594, the peak enrollment for the district. In the next six years it had declined to 13,396. By the end of the 1980's projected school enrollment is around 7,000 students. A district that had spent more than a decade responding to substantial growth was suddenly confronted with an equally substantial decline. The 1981 "Report of the Committee on Declining Enrollment" estimated that in the absense of changes in building use, in the 1984-85 school year approximately 8,000 students would be attending schools in facilities designed for 16,700 students. (DECLINGING ENROLLMENT,Vol. 2, p. 16.)

Bethesda was in the process of closing buildings, reorganizing grade structures, and reducing staff. At the beginning of the 1984-85 school year the ninth grade was to be moved to the high school. The junior high schools were to be changed to 6th - 8th grade middle schools. One junior high and several elementary schools were to be closed. Many teachers and some administrators were being laid off.

Substantial planning had gone into the response to declining enrollment. In 1976-77 and in 1980-81 Declining Enrollment Committees were appointed to study enrollment patterns and to make recommendations on how the district should respond. The district commited itself to decrease teaching and administrative staff to correspond with enrollment decreases. Staff reductions were projected several years in advance.

Planning, monitoring and program evaluation were important operating components of the Bethesda School System. Starting in 1977 the district has issued annual "Five Year Plans." These planning documents provide long-range direction for the schools and and semi-annual assessments of accomplishments. Each year's plan contains specific objectives to be accomplished over the next five years. Each consecutive plan specifies objectives to be worked on over subsequent years, reports on steps made in meeting earlier stated goals, and notes when objectives have been met. (Bethesda City School District, FIVE YEAR PLAN)

The district makes regular use of outside consultants and "citizen committees" in planning, goal setting, and evaluation. These committees are generally composed of citizens, students, school board members and school staff. In practice these committees seem to work well. Care is taken in their constitution. Tasks and expectations are defined and their recommendations heeded. Two such committees were involved in formulating the competency program.

With a reputation for educational innovation it is not surprising that Bethesda was among the few Ohio districts to initiate its own minimum competency program. As our description makes clear the competencies program was put together with care, implementated at considerable expense, and positively accepted by the schools and community. It is a local program developed to meet a set of locally identified problems.

B. The Bethesda Competency Program.

The Bethesda competencies program focuses on the high school years and upon the assurance of basic academic and survival skills. It includes a tenth grade minimum competencies test which must be passed for high school graduation. Other tests are used in the junior high years to identify student weaknesses and to steer them to appropriate remediation. The emphasis in the program is upon remediation. The bulk of the program costs have gone toward the development and implementation of special courses designed to correct particular skill deficiencies.

1. High School Focus.

The Bethesda program is directed toward skill testing and remediation during the high school years. As the program has been implemented diagnostic and remediation have been developed at the junior high schools. The original decision to focus on the high school years resulted from the fact that issues concerning the attitudes, motivation, and performance of high school students were of major concern in the community during the mid-1970's.

The original recommendation for the competencies program came in the report of a task force appointed to look into attitudinal and behavioral problems at the high schools. (See, "Toward A Community of Experience," 1975). The report reflects both a sense of urgency in addressing those problems and a pedegogical and philosophical commitement to the proposition that it was possible to affect basic student skills development even during the high school years. The task force rejected the notion that any substantial impact on student skills would have to take place in the elementary schools and placed immediate responsibility on the high schools. The "Report" said in part:

> Recent research points to the effectiveness of compensatory or remedial work in reading and mathematics when undertaken at the high school level. While this research stresses the need for continuing programs to raise skill levels starting before formal schooling, THERE IS NO JUSTIFICATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL STAFFS TO CONSIDER THEMSELVES INSULATED FROM SUCH CONCERN WITH PROPLEMS ON THE GROUNDS THAT ONLY IN THE EARLY YEARS OF SCHOOLING CAN ANY SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT IN BASIC SKILLS BE MADE. ("Toward A Community of Experience," p.39)

2. Minimum Competencies.

The Bethesda Minimum Competencies Assurance Program addresses basic academic and life skills. The program seeks to assure that students going through high school will have acquired, "the functional, coping, enabling and/or surival COMPETENCIES in reading, mathematics, problem-solving, human relations and other appropriate areas..." (REPORT OF THE COMPETENCIES COMMISSION, June 17, 1977) The Competencies Commission which defined the basic content and objectives of the program pointed out that the acquisition of these skills is only a minimum and represents only a part of what schooling is about:

> The development of functional or coping competencies is only one small part of schooling. Schools should continue to offer broad experiences in the fine arts, humanities, the usual college preparatory programs and vocationally related programs, particularly for students who have demonstrated that they are proficient in basic skills. These competency performance standards which are recommended represent only a minimum. (REPORT OF THE COMPETENCIES COMMISSION)

The Competencies Commission report defines minimum competency as, "a level of educational performance which predicts a reasonally good probability of a satisfactory, productive life." (REPORT OF THE COMPETENCIES COMMISSION, p.27). In terms of more concrete indicators of what was included in the notion of basic coping and survival skills the program identifies four basic skill areas and five basic content areas. The four skill areas are: reading, writing, computation, and problem solving. The five content areas are: community resources, occupational knowledge, consumer economics, health, and government and law. Basic and practical skills are stressed.

In determining the particular skills and substantive areas to be included in the minimum competencies the Commission drew upon the Adult Performance Level Project. They sought to apply its goals, objectives, and performance indicators to their own local needs. The measurement of basic competencies and the assistance of students having difficulties was to be accomplished through a combination of tests and special classes.

3. The Competencies Tests.

The Bethesda competencies program includes a series of tests administered during the junior and senior high school years. The tests are used for identifying specific student weaknesses and guiding them into appropriate assistance classes. The existence of a set of tests and remedial classes given prior to the 10th grade test underscores the remediation emphasis of the Bethesda program.

A 200 item APL test, based on the skill and content areas described above, serves as the basic measure of student competencies. It must be passed at the 70% level for high school graduation. This test is administered to most students during the spring semester of the sophomore year. When a student has demonstrated an ability to perform at the 70% proficiency level on each of the subparts of this test he/she has fulfilled the competencies component of the high school graduation requirements.

The tenth grade test is designed for use both as an indicator of individual competencies and as an instrument for diagnosing particular strengths and weaknesses. It is only one of several tests used for diagnosing student skills and screeing students for remediation. Two competencies tests are administered at the beginning of the eighth grade: (1) a High School Reading Proficiency Test, and (2) the Basic Competency Test in Mathematics. These tests are used to steer students into appropriate remediation classes.

A shortened, 100 item version of the APL Test is administered to nineth graders during the spring semester. This test is designed to identify deficiencies in the skill areas of reading, vocabulary, writing, computation, and problem solving; as well as the content areas of health, community resources, consumer economics, government and law, and occupational knowledge. Students who do not perform up to established proficiency levels on this test are assigned to assurance classes in those areas where they show particular weaknesses. The use of the 9th grade tests and the mandatory assurance classes in the first semester of the sophomore year provide basic remediation prior to the taking of the 10th grade test -- the test to which high school graduation jeopardy is attached. Remediation also is required of students who fail to meet minimum proficiency requirements on the tenth grade test (200 item APL). The student has several opportunities to re-take the test prior to graduation.

4. Assurance Classes.

The heart of the Bethesda competencies program and the core of the remediation is the set of assurance classes. These classes were designed specifically to assure that students acquire the basic skills recognized as the minimum competencies. Considerable effort and resources have gone into the development and implementation of these courses. Teachers in the Bethesda schools, primarily through summer workshops, developed these special classes. They involve "semi-individualized" teaching programs, built around skill development in areas of diagnosed student weaknesses.

The assurance classes are taken only by students diagnosed as having particular weaknesses. The diagnosis is based upon the competencies tests given in the 8th, 9th, and 10th grades, supplemented by teacher evaluations and course performance records. Students performing poorly on either of the two versions of the APL tests are required to take the assurance courses. One half unit of credit is awarded for completion of the course and of the section of the competencies test in that particular area. Normally students required to take a particular assurance course do not take other regular courses in that particular area --

math, English, etc. Each of the high schools has approximately eleven basic assurance courses. These include; 10th, 11th, and 12th grade sections of classes in English, math, and reading, a 10th grade social studies course and a 12th grade government course. Assurance classes in math and language skills are also offered at the ninth grade.

The format and content of the assurance classes reflect the philosophy and objectives of the Bethesda competencies program. They are based on the assumption that some students need particular attention and concentration to acquire basic skills. Special intervention, even during the high school years, can make a difference in whether or not those students develop these skills. Student motivation and the development of student self-confidence are important features of the assurance courses. The HANDBOOK of the program speaks to the general assumptions and approach:

> The minimum competencies assurance program is based on the philosophy that one way to improve a student's self-confidence is to demonstrate that a student can succeed -- success breeds success.
>
> Essential Steps in the Minimum Competencies Assurance Program.
>
> Establish the role of the teacher as an empathetic person.
>
> Establish a classroom climate of mutual respect and concern.
>
> Establish a climate in which it is understood that language, computation, reading and select social studies skills are universal attributes.
>
> Avoid making preliminary judgments about student capabilities. Subjective factors often lead one

> to overestimating or underestimating a student's potential.
>
> Diagnose and assess a student's abilities and deficits.
>
> Record current levels of achievement.
>
> Begin instruction at a point where the student is comfortable -- where he or she is competent.
>
> Limit instruction to a precise, easily learned segment of ideas, facts or concepts.
>
> Provide for instruction and practice to assure retention.
>
> Record progress.
>
> Reward progress by affirming the achievement in the student's mind and by telling the student that he has completed that segment -- although there may be review sessions to assure retention -- and by moving on to new learning. (A HANDBOOK FOR PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL, 4TH Revision, p. 9)

The district tries to make the assurance classes special and positive. The term "assurance" is used to get away from the "remedial" label with its negative connotations. Efforts are made to get all teachers involved in developing the courses. Teachers were paid to attend summer workshops in which the courses were developed. Teaching responsibilities for the assurance courses are to be shared by all teachers within a department, rather than designating particular teachers for them. Special techniques and materials are used in presenting the particular course content. No limitations were put on the purchase of materials to be used in these courses.

C. Impetus For Program.

The initial proposal for a competencies program in Bethesda came as part of a report of a task force appointed to look into attitudes and behavior of high school students. In August, 1975 "Toward a Community of Experiences: Report of the Task Force to Study the Attitudes, Values and Behavior of High School Age Students" was accepted by the Board of Education. The task force made up of students, community members, parents, teachers, school administrators, and school board members made recommendations relevant to three general goals relevant to improving the climate and educational programs of the two high schools. The three general goals were: to (1) Improve the human relationships in the schools; (2) Utilize student time more effectively, and (3) Improve student skills.

The recommendations on improving students skills were:

> 1. The Bethesda City School District should continue to dedicate itself to raising the student's level of competency in the basic survival skills such as reading, English, mathematics, problem solving, human relationships, and other appropriate areas. The Superintendent of Schools should request that the Board of Education adopt the concept that certain skill competencies should be established that every student, except possibly some handicapped students, must master in order to receive a high school diploma.
>
> 2. In order that this policy may be implemented it is recommended that the Board of Education direct the Superintendent to establish a commission of the professional staff, parents, and students to determine the required skill competencies and describe them in terms of the behavior a student would have to demonstrate to show mastery. This task should be completed so that it can be implemented for tenth-grade students in the fall of 1976. The fundamental responsibility for the students' mastering these skills rests with the faculty of the school system. Therefore, the professional staff should reexamine the allocation of its resources in order to provide the students sufficient supportive and instructional help so

> the students can master the skills. This reexamination of the resources should be carried on in the light of two factors: (1) students have time available to learn and master the skills; (2) time spent on the learning task is critical to the rate of learning and mastery.
>
> 3. The required skill competencies be continually reviewed to determine whether they are appropriate and sufficiently demanding in order to encourage the students continuously to upgrade their learning. ("Toward A Community of experiences," pp. 39-40)

These recommendations contain much of the basic philosophy and stucture of the program adopted two years later. The content of the recommendations suggests that the Task Force had devoted more than superficial attention to the question of minimal student competencies and how to assure them. Note the assertions that there is time and opportunity during the high school years for students to work on basic skills, that time devoted to skill acquisition has an impact on how much is learned, and that it is the responsibility of the faculty to concentrate on assuring basic skill development.

The recommendations for a minimum competency program came from a committee appointed to look at student values, attitudes and behavior; not from a task force set up to look at the curriculum or to investigate whether or not the school was doing an adequate job in teaching basic skills. School officials were concerned about behavioral problems, students allocating their time poorly, lack of academic motivation, and students' dropping out before finishing high school. As the students, parents, and educators on the Task Force looked at these problems they concluded that one factor contributing to behavioral and attitude problems was that some students had difficulties with basic academic skills and these difficulties affected their academic motivation and success. Some students were graduating without the basic academic and survival skills needed to get along in the adult world. In inquiring into what could be done to help they turned to the minimum competencies assurance concept.

It is not clear who first proposed the the minimum competencies concept. The Task Force brought in several outside consultants and looked at contemporary educational research and trends. The minimum competencies idea was taking root around the country at that time; so it is not surprising that the concept of a minimum competencies program was among the options considered.

There was agreement among those we talked with that there was no community pressure for a minimum competencies testing program. Neither the idea nor the motivation came from community pressures for school accountability. There seems to have been general satisfaction with the academic performance of the schools. Relationships among the school administration, the school board, and the community seem to have been good. However, when the idea of a minimum competencies program was proposed it was accepted by the school board and the community. One person on the school board at the time of adoption commented that no one on the Board had thought of a minimum competency testing program, but once the idea came up Board members embraced it.

On the other hand, we saw no indication that school administrators had decided they wanted a competency testing program and used the Task Force as a way to adopt their own agenda. Some district administrators were initially skeptical about minimum competency testing. Many of the teachers were apprehensive about the program.

Once the the program was recommended it received strong support from the top school administration. The superintendent strongly endorsed it and made it a key part of his program for the Bethesda schools. He devoted considerable effort to get it accepted by the high school staff. That backing was important in keeping the development of the program on track during the development stage and in gaining support among the teaching and administrative staff.

The fear of state action does not seem to have been an important motivating factor for Bethesda The Task Force recommendation came in 1975, well before the period of intense activity on the state level. Though not influenced by the threat of state activity the adoption of a minimum competency program was influenced by what was happening in schools in other parts of the county. Bethesda officials were well aware that other school districts and states were enacting minimum competencies programs. In the course of the development of their program they looked extensively at what other communities and states were doing. The Bethesda program, however, was early enough in the competency movement to be an innovator rather than a follower.

D. Program Development.

The recommendations of the Task Force to Study Attitudes, Values, and Behaviors of High School Age Students were endorsed by the superintendent and adopted by the Board of Education. Under the supervision of the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction a Competencies Commission was appointed to study ways to implement the objectives concerning the improvement of student skills. The commission, comprised of parents, students, and professional staff members identified three basic tasks for itself:

> Identify and determine the "functional, coping, enabling and/or survival" COMPETENCIES in reading, mathematics, problem-solving, human relations and other appropriate areas (consumer economics, community resources, health, occupational knowledge, government and law) which are necessary and essential for all students -- prior to graduate -- for successful adult living.
>
> Describe these competencies in behavioral terms which can be measured.
>
> Indicate the levels of competency which all students must demonstrate to show mastery. (COMPETENCIES COMMISSION REPORT)

The 43 Commission members were nominated by school principals. Care was taken to balance representation from the two high schools and from the three communities making up the school district. An eight member steering committee carried out much of the basic work of the Commission. The Commission reviewed research in the area, called in several educational consultants, communicated with 88 different school systems which were developing or implementing some type of competency program, and contacted 26 state Departments of Education to ascertain what they were doing in the area of competency based education.

In reaching its decisions the Commission identified the functional or coping skills and performance indicators of them; validated these skills through feedback from local parent and civic groups; developed and pretested a High School Reading Proficiency Test and a Competency Test in Basic Mathematics. The Commission studied the goals and objectives of the Adult Peformance Level Project, adopted that test to local objectives, and pretested that test with a random sample of tenth grade students.

The original charge was for the Commission to finish its work within a year. However, at the end of the year the work was not complete and the Commission was granted an extension. In March 1977 a status report was developed for review of the work of the Commission by various community groups. Using the work of the Commission the Steering Committee developed a set of "tentative and preliminary recommendations." These recommendations were distributed to various parent and civic groups for actions and suggestions. A fourth revison of these recommendations was presented to the entire Commission on May 4 for its final reactions. The final recommendations were submitted on June 15, 1977.

The final report made recommendations in five areas:

1. Recommendations related to assessing the degree of mastery of specific competencies:

Administer the High School Reading Proficiency type of competency program, and contacted 26 state Departments of Education to ascertain what they were doing in the area of competency based education.

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1. Recommendations related to assessing the degree of mastery of specific competencies:

Administer the High School Reading Proficiency

Examination Bethesda City School District to ALL eighth grade students during September of 1977 to assess their competencies in reading. Use the 70% proficiency level criterion to ascertain competency and as a level to identify students who require instructional assistance.

Administer the High School Mathematics Proficiency Examination Bethesda City School District to ALL eighth grade students during late September 1977 to assess their competencies in matehmatics. Use the 70% proficiency level criterion to ascertain competency and as a level to identify students who require instructional assistance. (Reduce the testing load at the eighth grade level by scheduling the Career Maturity Inventory at the ninth grade level.)

Administer the High School Survey Adult Performance Level Test to ALL tenth grade students to diagnose their knowledge level understanding and to assess their skill level performance in early November 1977. Use these data along with national data to establish criterion levels of performance necessary for graduation. Compare data from this measurement instrument with the High School Reading and Mathematics Proficiency Test Data and Ohio Survey Test Data (Grade 8) to ascertain the predictive value of the OST at Grade 8 in relationship to knowledge and skill development. Use the 70% proficiency level criterion to ascertain competency and as a level to identify students who require instructional assistance.

Administer the Adult Performance Level Test to ALL eleventh grade students in November of 1977 to diagnose their knowledge level understanding and to assess their skill level performance. Use the 70% proficiency level criterion to ascertain competency and as a level to identify students who require instructional assistance.

2. Recommendations related to providing assistance to students who do not perform at the prescribed criterion levels on the reading assessment, the mathematics assessment, the high school survey APL Test and the Adult Performance Level Test.

Expand and refine the present instructional activities which are designed to assist students improve their functional skills and knowledge into a more clearly defined MINIMUM COMPETENCIES ASSURANCE PROGRAM. This program will relate directly to the improvement of student skills and knowledge areas which have been identified through diagnosis and analysis as needing improvement. Furthermore, this program will include: staff development activities which focus on instructional strategies designed to assist students improve in specific skills, precise teaching and learning materials which relate to improving specific areas, articulation and communication among all levels of the school district regarding successes and problems in skill improvement, and communication and counseling with parents and students.

Recommend that the Superintendent assign one individual to be responsible for the Competencies Program. This would be in addition to his other responsibilities.

3. Recommendation related to developing differential or multiple diplomas.

Recommend that a small task force composed of parents, students and educators study the feasibility of developing multiple diplomas during the 1977-78 school year. Some members of the Competencies Commission should serve as members of this task force.

4. Recommendation related to the implementation of the competencies concept as a requirement for graduation for all students, except those who have specific handicaps.

Implement the COMPETENCIES CONCEPT as a requirement for graduation with the graduation of the 1977-78 Grade 10 students when they graduate in the 1979-80 school year. Use the 70% proficiency level criterion to ascertain competency. Students who perform at the 70% proficiency level on the ADULT PERFORMANCE LEVEL TEST at Grade Eleven will have fulfilled the competencies requirement for graduation.

5. Recommendation related to feedback and progress related to the competencies concept to members of the competencies commission and other groups.

Since communication of the COMPETENCIES CONCEPT is critical to success, it is recommended that:

The Competencies Commission meet twice each school year to review the status, problems and plans related to implementing the COMPETENCIES CONCEPT.

School personnel be assigned to plan and design a

> specific communications plan related to all facets of the Competencies Program. All Commission Members emphasize the importance of communicating the status of the program to all students, teachers and parents. All methods and media need to be considered. (COMPETENCIES COMMISSION REPORT,)

The recommendations of the Commission were adopted by the Board of Education without opposition. By the point of adoption the program had been under discussion for two years. Many of the most relevant teachers and school administrators had been involved in the development process. Presentations had been made to and feedback solicited from relevant parent and civic organizations. Administrators close to the process indicate that the process of development had not been easy. The Assistant Superintendent for instruction played an important role in keeping the Commission on track. One of the most difficult tasks was building and maintaining support among the instructional staff. Many of them were apprehensive about the program at the outset.

One of the most troublesome issues the Commission had to decide was the appropriate cut-off point for determining proficiency. After much consideration the 70% level was adopted. The issue of multiple diplomas also caused some difference of opinion. The Commission put off that decision and recommended that it be made by a subsequent smaller representative group.

The Commission worked hard over a period of almost two years. More than fifty meetings of the Commission and its Steering and sub-committees were held. Though some important features were altered as the program was put into effect and the assurance classes had to be developed, the basic features of.the competencies program were worked out by the Commission. It was adopted by the school district in the summer of 1977.

E. Implementation and Administration.

1. Extent of Implementation.

The competencies program recommended by the Competencies Commission was adopted by the Board of Education in August of 1977. At the time of our field research, in the spring of 1983, the recommended program, including the assurance classes, was in full operation. The program had been accepted within the schools and the community. In the words of the superintendent the program had been "institutionalized as part of the school program." He asserted the the minimum competencies assurance program was not going to be discontinued even with tighter budgets.

The extent of implemention resulted from two factors. First, there was strong support from top school administrators. The superintendent strongly backed the program and made sure that his support and his expectation that it be implemented were known on down the line. For this reason teachers were apt to take the program seriously.

The strong leadership support was accompanied by the commitment of substantial financial and staff resources. The district was able to allocate money to the program. Moreover, it was willing to spend money on program development, staff training, and the materials and supplies needed to carry out the program. Following the recommendation of the Competencies Commission, the district also devoted considerable effort to informing the community about the program and gaining its support.

Important aspects of the program were modified and expanded as it was implemented. The program was reviewed regularly and changes were made in its content, schedule, and administration.

2. Testing.

The basic set of tests and uses of the test results recommended by the Commission were in place in 1983. One important change had been made in the timing of the high school competencies test. Beginning with the 1980-81 school year the basic administration of the 200 item APL test, (the one that must be passed before graduation), was moved from the 11th grade to the 10th grade. This was done to allow more time to assist students having trouble with basic skills. The move provided an additional year for remediation before graduation.

Another change in the schedule of the test was planned. The time of test administration was to be moved from mid-April to the beginning of the spring semester. With the administration of the test in April results were not available to determine remediation programs until after the end of the spring semester. By moving the test forward it would be possible to have the results and to determine student schedules before the summer break. This would enhance schedule planning and permit students to undertake assurance classes during the summer.

At the time of the field work the following testing schedule was used for giving tests that are part of the competencies program:

Late August. APL 200 test given to seniors and juniors new to the district.
Early September. High School Reading Proficiency Examination and Basic Competency Test in Mathematics given to 8th graders.
Mid-October. APL 200 item test given to new students in 10th, 11th, and 12th grades.
January. APL 200 item test given to selected 12th grade students.
Late March. APL 100 item test given to 9th graders.
Mid-April. APL 200 item test given to 10th graders and to 11th and 12th graders who need to retake the test.

This testing schedule was designed to give students with problems or students needing diagnosis, adequate opportunity to get assistance and to pass the test before graduation. Students who fail to meet performance standards in their sophomore year are given a number of opportunities to retake the test prior to high school graduation. Assurance classes are offered at summer school, and students can take the test following the course. High school students moving into the district are provided with timely opportunities to take the test at the beginning of the school year.

In practice high school and district administrators are even more flexible. They have been willing to give the test to particular students at almost any appropriate time. They make efforts to maximize the possiblity that an individual student will pass the test; even hiring special tutors or modifying the testing environment for students with special needs.

At the time of the field work no one had failed to graduate as a result of not passing the test, though many students had failed to perform satisfactorily on the test one or more times prior to passing it. Bethesda administrators saw no problems in giving students considerable assistance in passing the test. They stressed that the passing of the competencies test as a final hurdle was not the important factor. The provision of individual student assistance is the most significant parts of the program. As one top district administrator said: "The test doesn't mean 1/10 of what the program is all about."

3. Remediation: Assurance Classes.

The Competencies Commission had recommended that the schools, "Expand and refine the present instructional activities which are designed to assist students improve their functional skills and knowledge into a more clearly defied MINIMUM COMPETENCIES PROGRAM." The most extensive and costly aspect of the implementation of the Bethesda program was the design and teaching of the various junior high and senior high assurance courses. These courses are designed to:

> ... provide every possible assistance to students who have demonstrated deficiencies in basic skills and in essential content areas with opportunities to improve those skill and content deficiencies so that students graduating from the senior high

> schools of the Bethesda City School District will be able to earn a living, travel from place to place, and manage money. ("A Handbook for Professional Personnel", p. 8)

These courses were described above. The senior high school level courses were introduced in the 1978-79 school year; the junior high level courses the following year. Staff development workshops were held in the summers of 1978, 1979, 1980, and 1981 to develop, modify, and refine these courses. They were developed by the teaching staff. In the fall of 1981 course outlines for these courses were published in a handbook entitled MINIMUM COMPETENCIES ASSURANCE PROGRAM HANDBOOK: SECONDARY COURSE OUTLINES.

Any teacher could elect to participate in these workshops. Teachers were paid for their participation and were provided with almost any teaching resources they wanted. Money was recognized by administrators as a major incentive for getting teachers to participate in these efforts and in signifying to them the importance the district put upon these courses. The workshops were dropped after the summer of 1982 as a means of saving the money.

In developing and staffing the assurance classes the district was making a concerted effort to get away from the negative connotations generally associated with remedial courses. The teaching of the courses was passed among the facuty. The guidelines suggested that they not be assigned to new teachers and that given teachers not be assigned heavy concentrations of assurance classes. In practice these guidelines were not always followed. There was an assumption that the learning of students having trouble acquiring basic skills could be enhanced by putting special emphasis upon the classes and paying special attention to the students in those classes.

Student enrollment in the assurance courses is based on the diagnosis of individual student weaknesses. The particular content and speed of advancement within a particular assurance class is based upon the needs of individual students and how quickly they acquire the basic skills under consideration. In implementing the assurance program specific guidlines for enrollment have been established. Students who perform satisfactorily on the several tests used to indicate basic competencies are not permitted to enroll in assurance classes. Students who score well below minimum standards on the tests are required to enroll in the appropriate courses. Nineth grade students who score below 65% on the APL 100 item test must enroll in the appropriate assurance classes and tenth, eleventh, and twelth grade students who achieve an over-all score below 70% on the APL 200 item test will be assigned to specific assurance classes. In cases where 9th grade students score between 65% and 69% on the 100 item APL careful consideration is given to determine if they should be assigned to assurance classes. In this determination a variety of test data, course performance, and teacher and counselor recommentations are evaluated to determine whether the student should enroll in appropriate assurance classes. During the senior high years students who score at the 70%

performance level on the over all 200 item test but below the 70% level on particular skill or content area sub-tests will be encouraged and counseled to enroll in appropriate assurance classes. "However, he has the OPTION to reject this opportunity. If he does reject the opportunity, both he and his parents should acknowledge this decision in writing." This acknowledgement states that the parent and student have been appraised of the deficiences and have decided not to be enrolled in an appropriate assurance course. It further states that, "The Bethesda School District will not be held responsible now or at any time in the future for my son/daughter's skill or content area abilities."

3. Graduation Requirement.

The Competencies Commission recommended that satisfactory performance on the 200 item APL test be required for high school graduation. It recommended that a small committe be appointed to study the question of the district offering multiple diplomas. A committee was appointed and recommended against the use of multiple diplomas. That option has not become part of the Bethesda competencies program. The graduation requirement went into effect for those graduating at the end of the 1979-80 school year. At the time of the study no student had been denied graduation because of failure to perform at the established level on the test.

4. Expenditure of Money.

As we have stressed above, the Bethesda City Schools spent a good deal of money in developing and implementing the competencies program. There was consensus among all of those we talked with that the district had committed extensive resources to the program. Teachers as well as administrators seemed aware of this. The willingness to commitment resources to the program was evident from the beginning of consideration.

Funds for consultants and for test development were available to the Competencies Commission for its work in identifying skill and content areas and designing appropriate test instruments. There have been continuing expenses in administering and evaluating performance on the various tests. The largest expenditures, however, were directed toward the development and implementation of the assurance courses. The summer staff workshops during which these courses were developed and tested cost the district a good deal of money, especially in summer staff payments. Officials estimate that these developments cost approximately $250,000. They estimate that the assurance courses cost the district $200 to $250 per student over the normal student cost. Official also point out that the extra cost per student of these courses is less than that for special gifted student classes.

As the district was beginning to find budgets tighter in the 1980's, some expenditures were being cut back. Summer staff workshops were not held in 1982 and 1983, largely because the district was not in a position to spend money on them. The ability and willingness of the district to spend liberally for the program had consequences for the quality of the program. It also helped to motivate teaching staff to participate in it and to accept and support it.

F. Program Impact.

1. Curriculum.

The major curriculum impact of the Bethesda competencies program was the introduction of the assurance courses. The implementation of the tests and the assurance courses has not led to many changes in the general high school curriculum. This is not surprising given the form, content and objectives of the competencies program. The program was not designed to alter the existing curriculum, but to monitor the acquisition of basic skills and to provide specific assistance to students having difficulties learning them.

The Bethesda program was built upon the proposition that most students routinely acquire basic academic and life skills as they go through the school years, but some do not. The minority who have difficulties can and should be helped and it is not too late to help them during the high school years. They need special attention and motivation in the form of special courses that concentrate on basic skill development. The provision of these special courses -- not altering the basic curriculum -- is the approach adopted by the Bethesda schools to assure that all students acquire the basic academic and life competencies.

While most of the high school teachers interviewed did not see the competencies program having much impact on the over-all curriculum many noted that the existence of the program caused them to be more sensitive to practical applications and basic skill development as they taught other courses. Math teachers, in particular, noted this influence. This form of indirect influence is also supported by the responses teachers gave to the question of whether the existence of the test caused them to think more systematically about the curriculum. 14 of the 20 teachers interviewed agreed that it had.

For the most part teachers and administrators saw a good fit between the tenth grade test and what was offered in the general curriculum. A strong majority reported a "good" or "generally good" fit. Few teachers saw a need to alter the curriculum to fit the test. A couple of teachers thought the focus of the test too narrow and elementary for the high school program. The curriculum offered much more than what was included in the test. They advised changing the test, not the curriculum.

One small problem in curriculum to test fit in the area of government and law was noted by junior high principals. The problem pertained to the 100 item APL test given in the 9th grade and used for screening for the 10th grade assurance classes. A number of students were not performing as well as anticipated on some of the government and law items. The junior high pricipals thought the problem resulted, in part, from the fact that the curriculum at the nineth grade required only one semester of civics. The second semester was optional and only about half the students took it. Some of the government items on the nineth grade 100 item APL test were covered in the second semester. It is interesting that though this problem was recognized there had been no immediate effort to alter the curriculum or change the test. Several teachers and administrators thought the problem might be addressed after the 9th graders were moved to the high schools.

A number of teachers responded affirmatively to the question of whether the curriculum had become more standarized and that curriculum decision-making had become more centralized since the introduction of the competencies program. Though some attributed this to the competencies program; more attributed the changes to the major curriculum revision that had taken place simultaneously with the introduction of the competencies program. School administrators noted that the curriculum review was initiated and motivated independent of the competencies program. It had followed its own schedule and pace. The fact that curriculum revision took place at the time the competencies tests and assurance classes were being put into place meant that the curriculum revisions were influenced by some of the same concerns that had motivated the competencies program. The existence of the competencies program, however, had not caused the revision of the curriculum, nor did any of those we talked with think its existence had had a measurable influence on the revision.

2. Teaching.

In considering the impact of the competencies program on how and why teachers perform it is important to distinguish between impact on their teaching of the assurance coursea.and on their regular courses. Most of the teachers we talked with were currently teaching or had taught assurance classes in math, English, or social studies. In responding to questions of how the test had affected their teaching they sometimes were referring to the teaching of the assurance classes. For others the reference was to their regular classes. This made it difficult to determine from the questionnaire responses just how much of an impact the program had had on teaching practices.

In the assurance classes teachers were using new techniques and approaches and stressing direct applications. Most teachers reported they had not altered the content and techniques used in other classes and did not see the competenies program having an impact on their classroom activities. Despite that general premise a number of teachers reported that experiences with the test and assurance classes had caused them to be more sensitive to applications and to include problem solving and practical applications in their general courses. Some of the teachers reported positive experiences in working with the assurance courses. They liked the approaches used in these courses and felt that students were being helped by the special program.

The teachers were asked what type of impact the testing program had had on their teaching. None of the teachers reported a negative impact. 73% of those at Bethesda High and 67% of those at Midpark High reported that the impact had been favorable. The remainder either reported "no impact" or a "neutral impact."

For the most part teachers did not feel pressure with respect to the test. Of the high school teachers we interviewed 16 of the 19 reported that they did not feel pressured to make sure their students did well on the test and the same 16 reported feeling that they were not pressured to teach to the test. Those who felt pressure noted it only in teaching the assurance classes. In these classes they were dealing specifically with the improvement of skills related to the 200 item APL examination and helping students to work on identified defficiencies so that they could pass the test the next time.

Most teachers think the existence of the testing program meant that they had less say over what they did in their own classes. Teachers interviewed at Bethesda High School were unanimous in saying that their performance as teachers was not judged by how well their students did on the test. The responses were somewhat different at Midpark High School. There 5 of the 9 teachers said they felt their performanced was judged either directly or indirectly by how well their students did on the test. Again the reference was to the assurance classes and a number of them said they felt they would be evaluated more positivly if the students they were working with passed the test. One possible explanation for the difference between the two high schools is that Midpark had moved more in a direction of having particular teachers teach the assurance classes instead of maintaining a strict rotation system. A few teachers expressed particular concern about the possibility of their passing a student in an assurance class who would subsequently fail to pass the same part of the APL test.

For the most part the competencies program seemed to intrude very little upon the basic classroom activities. Nor did it alter very much how teachers taught, interacted with each other, or were evaluated as teachers. The district administration emphasized at the outset that the test results would not be used to evaluate teachers. For the most part teachers felt this commitment had been kept.

3. Resource Allocation.

There was a widely shared perception that the Bethesda District had spent a considerable amount of money on the competencies program. None of the administrators tried to hide this fact. In response to the question of how much money had been spent on the testing program 16 of 19 teachers chose the, "a lot" response. Two chose "some," and one chose "don't know." Teachers volunteered additional comments such as, "unlimited budgets," "an incredible amount of money," "we had to work to spend it," and "tons of money," to express their feelings on how much was spent.

Though the teachers saw a good deal of money going into the competencies program they did not regret the expenditure or disagree with the decision to spend money for that purpose. They saw considerable resources going into the competencies program but did not see other programs suffering as a result. 8 out of 9 teachers at Midpark and 8 out 11 at Bethesda High reponded that they did not see the competencies program diverting resources from other programs. None of them saw resources being diverted from core educational programs. Most of the teachers seemed to believe the district had the resources to spend considerable money on this program without threatening the availability of money for other programs. A number of teachers used the term "add on" in talking about money spent on the competencies program. They had been assured that the money for the competencies program was being added to the over-all expenditures and was not taken from other programs.

The ability of the district to focus on the compentencies program without interfering with other aspects of the school program was also apparent with respect to curriculum emphasis. The teachers were asked if the competencies program meant "that we emphasize minimum educational achievemen instead of other educational objectives in our curriculum." 15 of the 20 teachers interviewed responded in the the negative. Most teachers recognized that the minimum competencies program put emphasis upon basics. Many of them thought that the level of achievement required was lower than desireable. However, they did not see that emphasis as dominating the curriculum or the general focus of the school.

4. Teacher Evaluation of Program.

Teachers and administrators in Bethesda evaluated the competencies program favorably and had positive feelings about what it was accomplishing. They also seemed satisfied with the way it had been developed and implemented and with the impact it was having on students.

The Bethesda administrators and teachers saw the program primarily as a tool for diagnosing individual student problems and trying to help them in learning basic skills. In response to an open ended question of what sort of impact the program was having most teachers mentioned impacts on individual students -- not impacts on the curricula, on the teaching of courses, or on school community relationships. When presented with three possible objectives for the testing program: (1) curriculum evaluation, (2) diagosis of individual student weaknesses, and (3) accountability, 19 of the 20 teachers interviewed chose diagnosis of student weaknesses. Only one chose accountability. All of the administrators also chose the student diagnosis response category.

These assessments of the program are consistant with our interpretation of the origins and objectives of the Bethesda program. All of the teachers interviewed favored keeping the test program and wanted to retain the passing of the test as a requirement for high school graduation. They liked having some clearly recognized standards for students to achieve and felt that the existence of the graduation requirement helped the students to take the test and the learning of basic skills seriously. 17 of the 20 teachers saw the students as taking the test "seriously" or "very seriously." In response to the item asking whether the school did "too much," "too little," or "the right amount," to prepare students for the test, all of the teachers interviewed chose the "right amount" response.

Though the assessments of the teachers were predominantly positive, there were undercurrents of skepticism. A number of teachers thought that the minimum requirement was lower than it should be. They would prefer to see higher minimum skill competencies required. Some teachers felt that the basic academic and life skills were not really what high school was all about. The focus of high school should be upon higher levels of learning and thinking and those abilities should be reflected in a test used as a requirement for high school graduation. These sentiments were more prevelent at Bethesda High school than at Midpark. This probably reflects the fact that as the older of the two high schools Bethesda High has retained more of a self image as a school whose primary mission is to prepare students for college. Bethesda High has a higher percentage of college bound students than Midpark.

However, even teachers with reservations such as these were willing to acknowledge the benefits of the competencies program. Though it did not reflect their own educational values and their perception of their own teaching mission, they agreed that an important segment of the student body was being helped by the program. The program was worthwhile -- especially if it did not interfere with the more important educational programs of the school.

5. The Test and the Public.

The Bethesda minimum competencies program had not been developed as a result of community pressure; nor was it viewed as serving a primarily accountability or public relations purposes. The focus of the test program was student diagnosis and remediation. Nevertheless, teachers and administrators saw the program contributing to their public credibility. Accountability related benefits were noted by both administrators and teachers as they talked about the program and its impact.

Though most teachers and administrators stressed the student evaluation functions of the test they also acknowledged the value of being able to say to the school board, the general public and potential employers of graduates that they had a test and remediation program that assured that their graduates had acquired basic academic and life skills. It demonstrated that they were concerned about basic skill training. They had a program that stressed the effective teaching of students who had problems and a test program designed both to guide students toward assistance and to make sure that students would not graduate without basic competencies in specified skill areas.

The existence of the program, the fact that it was locally developed, and the successes it was having in assuring basic skill training were regularly touted to the community in school district announcements and publications. Summary results of the test results and reports on the assurance courses were mentioned regularly in the school district newsletter.

G. Summary and Conclusions.

In Bethesda an extensive minimum competencies program has been developed and implemented. The program is directed toward one particular segment of the student body -- those having difficulties in acquiring basic academic and life skills. Except for taking particular tests, the majority of the students are not directly affected by the program. Their general curricular and classroom experiences were not substantially altered by the program. Remediation course work geared toward the tests was handled in assurance classes taken only by students diagnosed as weak in specific skill areas. Courses, programs, and learning experiences focussing on other student needs and interests were not diminished or threatened by the expenditures on the competencies program.

District administrators were successful in gaining the support of the teaching staff for the program. We discussed above the positive support of teachers for the program. Teacher support for a program such as this cannot be taken for granted. The writen work on minimum competency test programs suggests that teachers often are quite unhappy about minimum competency programs. Teacher hositility to existing testing programs was evident in some of the other districts used in this study. Several factors help explain the positive responses to the program among Bethesda teachers.

First, the teachers were brought into the initial stages of program·discussion and formulaion. They were part of the Task Force that recommended the program and the Competencies Commission that developed it. Teachers took the lead in developing the assurance courses. They were paid for participation in the summer workshops in which these courses were developed. They were given strong incentives to participate in course development and teaching. This helped to make it "their program", rather than one thrust upon them by someone else.

Second, in operation the program did not intrude very much on their ongoing teaching and related activities. The assurance classes were added to the curriculum to meet the particular needs of a specific group of students. There had been no effort to redesign the curriculum to correspond to the tests. Teachers were not pressured to "teach to the test." Nor did teachers feel they were judged by test results. In short, most of the negative outcomes of competency testing programs feared by teachers were not evident in Bethesda.

Teachers saw the impact of the program on the students rather than on the curriculum or their teaching practices. In their responses to an open ended question the teachers were asked about the general impact of the test. 17 of the 20 Bethesda teachers interviewed gave responses that noted the impact on students. Almost all of these responses were positive. They noted its role in motivating lower performing students, in providing assistance for students having difficulties, in making sure all students performed up to a basic minimum standard.

Third, the good financial condition of the district made it possible to spend a great deal of money on the competencies program without decreasing expenditures for other programs. No one had to suffer because of the decision to spend funds on this program. The general curriculum and programs directed toward other groups of students were not sacrificed to pay for the minimum competencies assurance program.

The key to understanding the Bethesda program and its acceptance by the teaching and administrative staff lies in the fact that the program was able to provide extensive and expensive assistance for one group of students without affecting other aspects of the school curriculum and programs. On the one hand, teachers did not feel pressured to change. On the other hand, most of the teachers were able to see that the program was helping one segment of the student body who were in need of assistance. Stated in simple terms, for most teachers the costs of the program was not high and they could appreciate student benefits.

To note the generally positive teacher assessments of the competencies program does not mean that teachers were entirely enthusiastic about the emphasis on basic skills at the high school level. As we noted above, many Bethesda teachers were initially apprehensive about the program. They were reluctant to accept the proposition that the teaching of basic skills was the responsility of the high schools. They were concerned about the possibility of shifting high school focus toward basic skills and away from higher levels of learning and thinking. Though these results had not been manifested, there remained important undercurrent concerns about the test focus. Some teachers expressed feeling that the testing and the assurance courses were not part of the heart of the high school curriculum and education. It was directed toward too low a level. It did not focus on what they thought to be appropriate high school level skills and performance. However, even teachers with these concerns were on balance supportive of the program -- some even with enthusiasm. They acknowledged that some students in need were receiving assistance.

What was the impact of the competencies program on the skill on the students it was designed to help? We did not focus on the test and the consequences of the assurance classes for student skill achievement. For the most part administrators and teachers thought the test and assurance classes were having the desired results. Administrators offered several indicators in support of assessment. First, they reported that over the years there had been some overall improvement in test scores. A smaller percentage of students were failing to meet the minimum achievement level. Second, the number and percentage of students enrolled in the assurance classes and the number of high school assurance classes offered had decreased. District administrators argued that with the greater effort in locating student with deficiencies and getting them into remediation programs in the eighth and ninth grades, the numbers of students doing poorly on the 10th grade test should decrease, and the number of students needing the assurance classes in high school should also decrease.

Third, there is evidence that the pre-graduation drop-out rate of high school students had decreased. Though district officials were cautious in interpreting drop-out data, they thought the competencies program was having a positive effect in this area. This factor is important because increasing drop-outs in the early 1970's was one of the concerns contributing to the adoption of the program. Bethesda officials had hoped that by paying special attention to students having academic difficulties and helping them to acquire basic skills would motivate, help them to feel successful academically, and encourage them to remain in school.

Several of the math teachers interviewed said that they thought the assurance classes had helped to increase enrollments in upper level math courses. With the assistance provided more students were picking up the basic skills which would enable them to continue with math courses.

Though general reactions to the minimum assurance program were positive there were some concerns raised. A number of teachers expressed their concern that the test was too easy and that too many were passing it. Some teachers and guidance counselors were skeptical that no one had failed to graduate because of not having passed the test and about the extensive measures the district had taken to get some students through. They wondered how much meaning the test had as a graduation requirement under these circumstances.

District administrators played down the importance of the test as a final hurdle. The providing of assistance to students who needed help was the important mission of the program. If the major criterion for judging the program is whether it is successful in keeping all students without a basic minimum skill level from graduating one can question the passing rate. On the other hand, if the basis of judgement is whether the school is making a real effort to provide assistance for students having difficulties in acquiring basic skills, the issue whether the test keeps students from graduating is less important.

It was also clear that the results of the tests were not being used as widely as they could have been. The test scores of individual students were used to determine which students were to be placed in the various assurance classes. The test scores were used in the assurance classes to determine just where the individual student weaknesses were. However, few teachers used the scores outside of the assurance classes. The scores were available in the offices of the guidance counselors, and teachers of regular classes could obtain them and make use of them in working with students needs. In practice few teachers made use of test score data for these purposes.

The lack of wider use of test score data was of concern to the district administrators involved in the test. The assistant superintendent had made some basic changes in test administration to try to make the test scores more readily available to teachers and to report them in forms that would make them more useful.

At the time of our study the Besthesda Competencies Program was pretty well implemented. It had become institutionalized as part of the high school program and was considered by most to be succesfully meetings its objectives. What about its future?

Even after several years of operation the program was being refined and improved. The original Task Force had recommended that it would be reviewed continuously and modified as conditions and expectations changed. This recommendation had been followed. There was some interest in expanding the testing and remediation procedures down to the elementary school.

We found nothing to suggest that the program would not be continued over the long run. Top district administrators and the high school administrators had a strong commitment to the program. In late 1982 the state had adopted a requirement that each district enact a competency program with periodic testing. That was a strong incentive to keep the program and to expand it to include the early grades.

One change is likely to affect the program. Revenue prospects for the district were changing. The district no longer enjoyed the substantial budget surpluses. Among other things declining enrollment was having a negative impact on revenues. The changing economic status had already led to the dropping of the summer teacher workshops. Both teachers and administrators regreted this.

More importantly the decrease in available funds was likely to affect the "politics" of school expenditures. We have noted that the abundance of of money was an important factor underlying the generally positive acceptance of the Bethesda program. In the absence of the large surpluses the district is likely to confront more "either or" funding situations. All programs could not be supported at the same levels. Some of the teachers, and we would assume many parents as well, were concerned about the need to provide substantial programs for gifted students. We would anticipate that the providing of the same high level of expenditures on the competencies program will come under increasing scrutiny and that there will be pressures from some to cut back. In our interview with him the superintendent made it clear that he considered the competencies program an established part of the school curriculum and that other programs would be tampered with first. Nevertheless, it is likely that with fewer resources the expenditures for the competencies program will be less universally accepted than they were when the program was new and their was plenty of money.

PART FOUR

CONCLUSIONS

XIII. CONCLUSIONS, GENERALIZATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS.

We have described the impact of the Missouri Basic Essential Skills Test on schools in three Missouri districts, and the formation and impact of locally developed competency testing programs in four Ohio school districts. In this final chapter we offer generalizations about local school impacts and suggest factors that account for the varying consequences. We also offer suggestions for policy makers interested in developing, reviewing, and revising competency testing programs.

Findings from studies of seven local school districts in two states do not permit definitive statements on minimum competency testing. However, with the information from these exploratory case studies, we can begin to understand the range of impacts and to identify factors that account for particular consequences. This information should be useful for the formation of hypotheses for subsequent research. The findings should also be useful for policy makers involved in formulating competency testing programs.

This concluding chapter is developed in three parts. In the first part we make some generalizations on impacts. In the second section we offer some additional observations about minimum competency testing. In the final section we present some recommendations for policy makers.

A. Generalizations About Impact.

Our research makes clear that minimum competency tests can affect local schools in very different ways. Testing programs are designed for and used for a multiplicity of purposes. Even a common state test can have varying effects on different schools. In this section we note the responses and identify factors that help account for variations in impact.

1. Impact on Curriculum.

How competency testing program affect local school curricula is one of the major concerns about the imposition of testing requirements. Proponents of testing programs argue that competency testing will lead to improvements in local school curricula. They will force the schools to pay more attention to basic skills. Opponents fear testing requirements will lead to standardization and the emphasis on basics at the cost of other skills and educational objectives. Our research suggests that the extent to which local curricula were affected by test requirements varies greatly. Even a common state test requirement does not affect all schools in the same way.

The critical factors determining the extent and form of curriculum impact seem to be: (1) The extent to which the test program in design, intention and application is used for curriculum evaluation or change; (2) The extent to which the test and its objectives match existing curriculum; (3) The extent to which the district administrators are motivated to change curriculum to fit the test.

In the Ohio cases testing programs had little impact on existing curriculum. Remedial or assurance classes were added, but the existing curricula were not changed as a result of the test programs. In the Taylor County districts the 10th grade test was developed to reflect the existing curricula. It tested objectives already covered in the curriculum. The program emphasis was on the remediation of students who failed to pass the test.

In the Bethesda district, the Assurance Program was based on the assumption that most students routinely pick up the identified basic skills from the existing curriculum. However, some students have difficulties learning them. The Bethesda solution was to provide special courses, emphasizing skill development, for those students. The regular school curriculum was not tampered with; the educational program for most students was not altered.

In the Missouri districts school administrators and teachers had to cope with a state developed test. A single standard was imposed on more than 400 different school districts with widely varied academic programs. As such, the test did not reflect exisiting local curricula. The lack of fit was most apparent with respect to the sub-test on government/economics. In many instances the eighth grade test covered materials that were not handled in courses offered up to and through the eighth grade.

For these reasons the major local district impact of the Missouri test mandate was in the area of curriculum. The districts differ in how much change they made in to response to the test mandate and how quickly those changes occurred. In some districts curriculum adjustments were quick and substantial. Others made few changes even over several years. Changes tended to be made when, and to the extent that school boards or administrators determined their students were not performing up to their expectations, especially in comparison with other districts. The Gardenway district played down the importance of the BEST at first. When students did not perform up to expectations, the district acted explicitly and directly to improve test performance by altering the curriculum. Riverton made minimal changes in its curriculum in response to the BEST. Riverton school officials were not displeased with how their students performed, and they did not like the test and the way it was handled by the state.

The greatest curriculum impact in Missouri was in the junior high or middle schools, especially the eighth grade. This resulted from the publicity on the BEST at the 8th grade level.

2. Impact on Teachers and Teaching:

The potential impact of minimum competency tests on teachers and teaching has been the source of considerable controversy. Teachers and teachers' organizations have been among the strongest opponents of test mandates. The negative argument is that teachers will be forced to "teach to the test". They will be pressured to make sure their students perform well on the tests and evaluated by how well their students do, and teachers will be forced to adjust their courses to emphasize test oriented basic skills, while other aspects of the curriculum are slighted. The positive side of the argument is that teachers need to be forced to give more attention to basic skills. The tests serve to assure such emphasis and to evaluate how well teachers are performing.

As with other areas of impact the experiences of the seven districts point to the variety of impacts tests can have on teachers and teaching. Among the districts studied teacher responses ranged from almost unanimous positive feelings in one district to widespread resentment in another. District responses are related both to the form and general purpose of the test and the ways local administrators implemented the test program.

The teacher impact can be seen in the feeling among teachers that they must orient their teaching to fit the test, that they are under pressure to make sure their students perform well on the test, and that their performances as teachers are judged by how well their students perform. The experiences of the Gardenway district illustrate how a test requirement can be implemented in ways that create teacher anxieties. In our summary chapter on the impact of the Missouri test we noted other districts in which teachers felt pressured to make sure their students did well on the test--even to the point of cheating.

Experiences in the Ohio districts suggest that a minimum competency program need not result in such anxieties and resentments. In Bethesda and the Taylor County districts teachers did not feel pressured to "teach to the test." For the most part they did not feel compelled to change the content or form of their classes. Nor did many teachers feel they were being evaluated by test results. In both locations school administrators worked to develop teacher acceptance of the test programs. They emphasized that teachers were not to teach to the test and that teachers were not to be evaluated by test results. The accountability aspects of competency testing were not emphasized.

Even among the Missouri districts there were variations in test impact on teaching. Not unexpectedly the amount of impact felt by teachers parellels the impact on curriculum. In Gardenway, where the community, school board, and school administrators expressed explicit concern about test scores, teachers tended to feel pressured. In Riverton, where administrators resented the test and were not anxious about student performance on the test, teachers felt little pressure to change. Nor did they sense that they were being evaluated by the test results. Administrators in Franklin seemed torn between two impulses. On the one hand, they wanted to raise test scores and made the test a requirement for graduation to emphasize the importance of the test. On the other hand, they held back from putting pressures on teachers to change their behavior.

The motivation behind the statewide BEST, the public disclosure of district test scores, and the public comparisons of district performances made the BEST susceptible to accountability-related pressures on teachers. However, within that common context actual impacts on teachers and teaching depended in large measure on decisions made by local officials.

Among the seven districts studied, responses of teachers to their testing programs were most positive in Bethesda and most negative in Gardenway. Teacher responses seemed to be influenced by the following factors:

a. The extent to which teachers participated or did not participate in program development and legitimization.

In both Ohio cases school administrators acted effectively to involve teachers very early in the process of test development. Test proponents anticipated teacher apprehensions and sought to get teachers to "buy into" the programs early in the process. These factors helped to win teacher support in the Ohio districts.

b. The extent to which the particular test program intruded upon existing school practices and programs also influenced teacher response. The more the program intruded, the more difficult it was for teachers to accept the new program.

c. Program costs, particularly those borne by the teachers, affected teacher responses. The extent to which teachers had to change their courses, their teaching approaches, and the way they allocate their time, are significant program costs for teachers.

d. Teacher responses to the test programs were also affected by the extent teachers felt compelled to teach to the test and perceived that they were being judged by student performances on the test.

e. The extent teachers saw identifiable benefits for students or the schools in the test program.

It is possible to condense these ideas into a simple cost/benefit formulation. Teachers were most supportive of the test program when they found the costs of the program minimal or easily bearable and were able to identify particular benefits. They were most negative when the costs were great and the perceived benefits few. These ideas will be developed in more concrete form in the comparison of teacher responses in Gardenway and Bethesda.

3. Resource Allocation.

Another of the controversies raised about minimum competency testing is that it is costly and often leads to the reallocation of resources -- money, staff effort, and class time -- from some curricula areas to others. Each of the districts put some resources into its program. The amount of money and staff resources varied, as did the extent to which other programs were affected or resources diverted from other areas. The greatest allocation of money and staff time was spent in the Ohio district of Bethesda. In Taylor County, on the other hand, the three districts and the County office developed and implemented a competency program with the expenditure of very little money. In both of these cases programs were put into operation without diverting resources from other programs or aspects of the curriculum. In Taylor County this was possible because little actual money was spent on the program. In Bethesda it was possible because the district had available substantial budget surpluses at the time the program was being developed and implemented.

Among the Missouri Districts, Gardenway spent the most in implementing the BEST requirement. More than the other Missouri districts, Gardenway had the resources and was prepared to use them to improve its test scores. The two other Missouri districts devoted relatively few resources to the implementation of the BEST. Some attention was paid to reviewing the curriculum and some course changes were made, but in neither Franklin nor Riverton was much time or money allocated to specific test preparation nor were resources taken away from other areas.

As in other areas of impact the level of effort and reallocation was determined in Missouri by the extent to which local school officials were motivated to improve student performances on the test. In the two Ohio districts the availability or lack of money conditioned the level of expenditures on the programs and determined how fully and effectively the programs were implemented. Taylor County school leaders were constrained from the beginning by limited resources. Their program was acceptable by school staff and the community as long as it was not too costly and did not take money away from other things. The Bethesda District would not have devoted the extensive resources it did to the competencies program if it did not have the uncommitted resources to devote to it. Nor is it likely that the program would have been so widely accepted if it had entailed diverting resources from other programs.

4. School/Community Relations:

As a tool for accountability or a public relations instrument, minimum competency tests can affect how schools relate to their local communities. One of the major motivations behind the competency testing movement is the desire to have available a tool to assess school performance. In practice there was considerable variety in the extent to which test programs became an important component of school community relations. The extent to which the test programs affected these relationships depended upon three factors: (a) the form and purpose of the test; (b) the extent to which local communities were interested in school performance; and (c) the inclination of the school administrators to use the programs for these purposes.

With its accountability rationale, the use of the same test in each district, and the public reporting of test scores, the Missouri BEST provided a ready tool for communities who wanted to assess and compare the performance of their schools. The Gardenway School Board and community used the test results in this manner. The consequence was that considerable effort put into improving the test scores. The tests developed by the Ohio Districts, however, did not lend themselves so readily to this purpose. First, there was no common statewide test for comparative use. In the

Taylor County case the policy of not reporting district level test scores meant that the public was not in a position to use the test scores for general program evaluation. In Bethesda the test program was unique to the district and comparative evaluations were not possible.

5. Gardenway and Bethesda: Contrasting Responses.

We conclude this section on a more concrete level, comparing the responses of teachers in the Gardenway and Bethesda districts. An analysis of these contrasting responses is informative about test impact and teacher responses.

Among the seven districts the reactions of teachers were most negative in Gardenway and most positive in Bethesda. 80% of the Bethesda teachers interviewed rated the impact of the testing program as "positive" or "very positive." Only 14% of the teachers in Gardenway saw the impact as positive. Over half of the teachers in the Gardenway district thought the test program was having a negative impact on the curriculum. None of the teachers in the Bethesda district expressed that sentiment. Similiar contrasts are evident in resonses to other items pertaining to teacher evaluations of test impact.

These contrasts are particularly interesting because of the similarities between the two districts. Both serve largely middle class suburbs of major metropolitan areas, though each has an important component of working class or minority students. Each district has a tradition of providing quality education to student bodies in which many students are college bound. In both Bethesda and Gardenway there are community expectations that the schools provide a good education for high achieving students. Many teachers in both districts indicated a feeling that the teaching of basics should not be the central focus of the curriculum or of their teaching. They regard the teaching of higher level thinking and academic subject matter as more appropriate for their grade levels and their particular schools.

Given these similarities why were teacher responses so different. Several factors help account for the different impacts.

a. External Imposition vs. Local Formation:

The Gardenway district was administering a test developed and imposed by the state. Gardenway teachers tended to dislike the content and form of the test and the way its administration was handled by the state. The Bethesda competency program was developed locally to meet particular local objectives. Teachers and building administrators were involved in the decision to develop the program, as well as its formulation and implementation. Through this process many of the teachers "bought into" the program. The difference between an externally imposed test and a self developed one probably had some influence on the different responses.

b. Program Intrusion:

Teachers in the two Gardenway middle schools saw the competency test and the local school activities associated with it, as intruding significantly on the school program and their activities as teachers. Courses were altered. Class time was spent preparing students for the test. Pre-tests were administered. Most eighth grade students spent a good deal of time getting ready for the test.

In Bethesda teachers found that the competencies program intruded little on the school program. Courses were not changed. Except for taking the tests, the academic lives of most students were not affected directly by the program.

c. Pressure on Teachers:

Teachers in both Gardenway and Bethesda had initial apprehensions about the imposition of a minimum competency test. In Gardenway teachers seemed to find their fears justified. Teachers felt under considerable pressure as a result of the clear directive to raise test scores. The altering of courses and the pretesting represented pressure to "teach the test." Many of the teachers felt their performance as teachers and the performance of the schools were being judged by how well students did on the test. The fears teachers and educators have voiced about the impact of minimum competency testing seemed born out by the Gardenway experience.

In Bethesda the competencies program was implemented without the teachers feeling pressure to teach to the test or that their performance as teachers was being judged by test results. Though a few of the teachers felt "self-imposed pressure" with respect to the teaching of assurance classes, teachers, on the whole, did not feel pressured or threatened by the test program.

d. Costs and Benefits:

Teachers in Gardenway seemed cognizant of the costs of the program -- course changes, changes in curriculum emphasis, increased pressures, etc. The sidetracking of their "Project Excellence" was one concrete cost. The time, resources, and emphasis the district felt compelled to devote to raising BEST scores led to the postponement of the development of their own competency program. Gardenway teachers, on the other hand, were less likely to cite important benefits from having the BEST.

The perceptions of Bethesda teachers were different. First, they bore few costs as a result of the program. The basic curriculum was not changed. Many teachers had to take a turn teaching one of the assurance courses, but they were paid for summer time devoted to course development, encouraged to experiment, and provided whatever resources and materials they wanted in developing these courses. Bethesda teachers did not see other programs suffering because resources were devoted to the competencies program. They had been convinced that the money spent was an "add on." It had not been taken from anything else.

Moreover, most of the Bethesda teachers acknowledged that the program was benefiting students who needed help. These perceptions came out at two points in the interviews. Teachers were asked what they thought had been the major impact of the test. Many of the teachers mentioned the impact on students who needed help. Similiar points were made in responses to the question of whether the teacher favored keeping the test. The Bethesda teachers were unanimous in favoring retention of the program. After several years experience they had concluded that the cost of the program for them had not been great and that many of the students needing help were getting it.

These contrasting reactions are consistent with the distinctions in program rationale and emphasis. The BEST was seen by Gardenway administrators and many of the teachers primarily as an accountability measure. Though much effort was put into getting students to pass the eighth grade test, little systematic effort afterwards was placed on working with students the test indicated were having problems in basic skill areas. The emphasis in the Bethesda program was upon diagnosing and remediating individual student weaknesses.

B. Additional Observations:

We offer some brief observations from our research on minimum competency testing. The observations fall in two general areas: the politics of minimum competency testing and the uses (and nonuses) of the tests.

1. Observations on The Politics of Minimum Competency Testing.

The politics of program development has not been our major focus. However, since the minimum competency testing movement has been identified as more of a political movement than an internal educational reform effort (See Chapter I), we want to offer some observations from our research on that issue.

a) State Level Response:

In the sections on Missouri and Ohio we discussed state level responses to the "minimum competency test pressure." For the most part our findings of state level activities are consistent with the observations of Chris Pipho, at the beginning of the monograph. In acting on minimum competency testing proposals, policy makers were responding to a vague general concern about school performance accountability. Legislative and educational policy makers sensed that there was widespread interest and even pressure for minimum competency testing, but could not identify concrete, organized support. With few exceptions most education oriented groups were opposed to state level testing mandates. We probed lawmakers and state educational leaders in both states to identify the base of support for minimum competency testing. One Ohio lawmaker who supported an accountability oriented testing program lamented that he could not get any of the organized educational groups to get behind his move for a strong state mandate.

In Missouri the Missouri Farm Bureau was cited as a group that rallied behind a state program and seemed to have been important in the department's decision to support a state requirement. From the standpoint of state and national policy action it is significant that so many state legislatures and/or state educational departments could be influenced to act in the absence of strong organized support.

It is interesting that Missouri and Ohio, two states which share many characteristics with respect to education support and organization, responded so differently to the competency testing issue. Why did Ohio resist for so long the pressure for a program? Why did Missouri act relatively early and adopt a statewide test requirement? Why did Ohio, when it acted, adopt a relatively non-intrusive requirement? We will not attempt a detailed analysis of these different responses, but the following two factors might help explain the responses.

First, educational interest groups seem to be relatively stronger in Ohio than in Missouri. The major Ohio groups, though divided on many education issues were together in opposing a state test requirement. The major teachers' organization, the school administrators association, and the school board association all opposed a state test. These groups had access to the policy making process and were willing to use their positions to defeat efforts for a state test.

Secondly, the structure of the state level educational bodies in the two states differ in ways consistent with the two patterns of action. In Ohio the State Board of Education members are elected in local districts and run independently of other candiates for office. In Ohio the education policy bodies are structurally and politically independent of the legislature and the governor. At the same time the Board and the Department have close ties with local education constituencies and interests. In Missouri the governor appoints the Board of Education. Consequently, they do not have the structural ties to local constituencies.

b. Local Level Response:

At the local district level we were struck by the absence of citizen and local school board interest in initiating competency testing. The popular notion is that concerned citizens, unhappy with school performance, are pushing reluctant school leaders to adopt testing programs. We found that there had not been interest expressed or pressure exerted from the public in any of the seven districts for a minimum competency test, not even in the Ohio districts which developed their own program. In Taylor County school leaders decided on a program and set out to sell the community on it. The Bethesda program originated in a joint teacher, administrator, citizen task force, but school officials seem to have taken the lead in developing and gaining acceptance for the program. Pressures which were so powerful at the state level were not evident at the local level. In Gardenway there was pre-BEST concern about improving school performance and support for a competency-based education program, but there does not seem to have been pressure for a minimum competency test.

2. Some Observations on the Uses of the Tests.

We offer three observations on how the tests or test data are used, or not used.

a. The existence of the test programs seemed to make many teachers more sensitive to the needs of students having troubles with basic skills and to the value of emphasizing practical applications. Even teachers who were not supportive of the tests and who were emphatic about not changing their courses as a result of the test often noted their new appreciation of presenting practical applications and helping students see the relevance of basic information.

b. Some of the teachers seemed to like having the test as a motivation for students or even as a "club" they could hold over students' heads. The existence of the test, especially if it were tied to a graduation requirement, provided teachers with a ready response to student questions as to why they should learn about commas or prepositions. The teacher could simply reply that it is on the test and you need to pass the test. It is interesting how often teachers related this explanation in talking about the impact of the test.

c. We found in every district that test results were not utilized as much as they could have been. In all instances they are used to determine when a student has "passed the test." In the Ohio districts, where specific remediation is required for those who fail to pass the 10th grade tests, the test scores are used in the remediation. However, other teachers seldom used individual test score results to understand student weaknesses, to provide assistance to students having troubles, or to evaluate their courses. Test scores on individual students were available, but both guidance counselors and teachers testified that they were seldom looked at.

It would seem that much more use can be made of test score data. Test results could be especially useful in working with students who barely pass the test and have specific weakness that need attention. School administrators probably need to take the lead in sensitizing teachers to the greater diagnostic use of student test data. Administrators in the Ohio districts, where greater emphasis was placed on diagnosis and remediation, expressed concern about not fulling utilizing test data.

C. Lessons For Policy Makers.

As a conclusion to this monograph we offer some "lessons" for those involved in developing, implementing, and/or revising minimum competency programs. Some of these suggestions may be more generally applicable to other educational policies as well. On the basis of our studies of these seven local school districts and our more limited investigation of policy making at the state level in Ohio and Missouri we suggest the following:

1. Clearly define objectives and think through consequences of test and program.

In developing or evaluating a state mandate or local program it is important to determine clearly what one wants to accomplish -- e.g.: Is the primary interest student diagnosis and remediation, or school assessment and accountability? One will want to follow different procedures depending on what the major objectives are. Policy makers also need to think through probable consequences of different components of what they propose or require. Do they want to encourage or discourage public comparisons of districts? Do they want to force significant changes in local school curricula.

These points may seem self evident. However, our assessment of minimum competency testing activity is that many programs and requirements have been adopted without clear notions of basic objectives and assessment of consequences.

2. Develop and implement programs in ways to encourage support of local administrators and teachers.

Whether programs are implemented and the specific impact they have on local schools depend, in large measure, on the support they get at the local level -- from superintendents, principals, and teachers. Program designers should be sensitive to what motivates local educators and how they will respond to requirements.

2a. Make an effort to involve teachers and local school administrators in the process of developing and implementing the test program. Encourage their participation as early as feasible so as to establish among them a feeling of ownership and commitement.

2b. Determine the cost/benefit calculations teachers and administrators are likely to use in responding to the test requirement.

2c. Work to implement the program in ways that help to minimize the costs and maximize the benefits as perceived by teachers and local administrators.

2d. Building administrators are probably the key people in determining how testing mandates are perceived by teachers and the manner in which they are implemented. They in turn take their cues from districts leaders.

3. Choose carefully the grade or grades at which test or tests are to be given.

A number of factors need to be considered in determining the point or points in which minimum competency tests are given. If one wants to permit time for remediation, a single test at the 11th or 12th grade is too late. The Missouri experience suggests some problems with giving a test as early as 8th grade, which covers curriculum traditionally offered in high school. With many schools placing the 8th grade at a middle or junior high school and the students moving to the high school at the 9th grade, there also is a break in communications between the administration of the test at the 8th grade and what is provided for the student with problems afterward. High schools tended to look at the test as a middle school issue and were reluctant to get involved seriously in test related assessment and remediation.

According to Chris Pipho (1980), Missouri and Delaware were the only states to test at only one grade level. The most-used combination was testing at the end of elementary school, once in junior high school and again once before high school graduation.

4. Tying the test to high school graduation helps motivate both students and the schools to take test seriously and to identify and

remediate student weaknesses.

Initially we were skeptical about the desirability of tying passage of the test to high school graduation. Our investigations of districts with and without the sanction lead us to conclude that if the test is a valid measure of relevant skills and one wants to get assistance to students needing help, jeopardy is an important tool. The sanction seems important in motivating the student to take seriously the learning of basic skills. More importantly, it is an incentive to the schools to put needed effort into post test remediation. If it is worthwhile to have the test, it is worth having a meaningful sanction so that all parties -- students, parents, and the schools -- take it seriously.

5. Consider at the outset whether and in what form test score results will be made public.

Policy makers need to determine early the extent test scores will be made public and the form in which they will be released. Our studies suggest that this is a crucial decision. Do policy makers want public comparisons of districts or school results? Such publicity can be a powerful tool to motivate districts. It can also distort the meaning and consequences of a test program. At the outset policy makers may have some choices as to what is done. The Missouri experience suggests that once test data is organized to allow inter-district comparisons and public disclosure takes place, it is difficult to reverse it.

6. It is important to consider how one wants test results and information to be used internally.

The form in which test results are recorded and presented for internal use also has important consequences. It can be organized to make it more or less difficult to diagnose individual students; to evaluate the curriculum; to evaluate teacher performances. If one wants results to be used by teachers and counsellors in working with students, test results need to be organized in ways to make this use easy. If one does not want them used to evaluate individual teacher performances they should not be organized by classroom.

7. The scheduling of tests within the school year should be done to maximize their potential use in student evaluation and schedule planning.

The scheduling of tests and scoring them in time to be used in student evaluation, counselling and course scheduling is important. Tests are often administered too late in the school year for the results to be used constructively for student remediation or counselling before the end of the school year.

8. Test results contain much useful data. Teachers and counsellors should be encouraged to make use of it.

Competency test results for individual students contain information that could be used in working with all students, not just those who fail to meet minimum requirements. Test data is not used to help identify areas of student weaknesses if the student "passed" the test. A good deal of important information, thus, goes unused. Administrators should ensure that test results are readily available to teachers and encourage teachers to make use of them. Minimum competency tests should be a tool, not the end goal.

9. There are pros and cons to the use of both a common state test and to allowing individual districts to develop their own tests.

Our study is too limited to permit analysis of whether it is better to have a common state test or permit or require local districts to develop their own programs. In our study, we did not have instances of local districts being required by state mandate to develop their own competency testing program.

There are arguments for and against state vs. locally developed tests. If one wants to have a common standard to evaluate school performances or to enforce a common curriculum, a common state test might be preferable. On the other hand our studies suggest that much can be gained from the experiences of local districts in developing their own testing programs. The process itself is useful in understanding and evaluating their educational program. Such participation also helps to create among teachers and staff a sense of ownership and commitment to the program. For state policy makers, the most important advice we can offer is to think through the desired results and determine which approach will be most effective.

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APPENDICES

1. Brief Project Description.
2. Outline for Administrator Interviews.
3. Letter sent to Teachers.
4. Teacher Questionnaire.

BRIEF PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Title: The Impact of Minimum Competency Testing Programs on Local Schools.

Researchers: Karen S. Dawson and Richard E. Dawson, Center for the Study of Public Affairs, Department of Political Science, Washington University in St. Louis.

Support: Funded in part by the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education.

This study is investigating the impact of minimum competency testing programs on selected local school districts in Missouri and Ohio. The investigation is exploratory, seeking to ascertain what consequences have followed from the introduction of such testing programs in local districts.

Over the past eight years there has been a rapid and widespread movement toward the adoption of minimum competency testing by states and by local school districts. Since the mid-1970's almost three-fourths of the states have adopted regulations requiring some form of minimum competency testing in local school districts. The main arena for the development of minimum competency testing programs has been the state level. Many school districts have had to respond to state mandated testing requirements. In some instances local districts have implemented minimum competency testing programs in the absence of state requirements.

At present little is known about what happens in the schools as a result of the introduction of minimum competency testing. Do such programs lead to more standardized curricula and more centralized decision-making? Is the allocation of educational resources altered? Do higher test scores emerge as major school objectives? Do test scores become a visible criteria through which schools are judged?

The focus of this research is on how testing programs affect organizational, administrative, and distributional factors within the schools -- rather than upon the impact of the testing on student competencies. Both the intended and the unanticipated consequences will be examined. The rationale for minimum competency testing programs is to increase educational quality and raise student competencies, and to provide a means for holding schools accountable for their educational tasks. However, the introduction of such programs is likely also to affect the structure of school curricula, what teachers do in the classrooms, how school resources are allocated, and how, where, and by whom basic education decisions are made in the schools.

Through case studies of several local school districts we propose to trace what has occured in the schools as minimum competency testing programs have been implemented. We are using local districts in two states: Missouri, where a common state test must be given in each district; and, Ohio, where a number of local districts have developed and implemented programs on their own in the absence of any state requirement. The study should help us to understand better the consequences of implementing minimum competency testing programs. In addition to contributing to general knowledge of school programs the results of the study should be useful for educational policy makers who are developing testing programs or evaluating those currently in effect.

We plan to undertake systematic in-depth studies of five or six local districts to learn about the implementation and impact of secondary level minimum competency testing programs. We will analyze written materials on the testing programs and interview administrators, teachers, citizens, and others that have been involved in the development and implementation of the testing programs. Our primary objective is to see how the implementation of minimum competency programs have affected school practices.

Between September and November we will collect background materials and interview relevant people at the state level in Missouri and Ohio. During November, December and January, we are identifying and selecting local school districts that might be appropriate for our case studies; making contact with officials in those districts to learn in general about their implementation of competency testing programs; and seeking their cooperation in the project. During January and February we will finalize the formats for the case studies and gather written materials on the test programs. In March, April and May we will undertake the field work in each of the districts, interviewing the appropriate teachers, administrators, etc., and gathering any additional written materials needed for the study. During the summer of 1983 we will analyze the materials and write up the results of the study.

November 1982

Feb. 13, 1983

OUTLINE OF QUESTIONS TO ASK LOCAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS ABOUT IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF MIMIMUM COMPETENCY TESTING PROGRAMS.

Background information on respondent:

1. Name:
2. Position:
3. Length of time in District:
4. Length of time in current position
5. Teacher tenure?
6. Gender and race

A. Describe the process of administration of the BEST in your school?

1. What was the general reaction in your district when the test requirement was first introduced? (1978-1979)
2. Describe how the test has been administrated in your school. By whom? Where? Under what conditions?
3. What steps if any have been taken to prepare students for the tests? Practice tests? Review sessions? Etc.?
4. How are scores reported? To the students? To parents? To the Board? To the public? To teachers? In what format?
5. What type of remediation program, if any, has been used at your school?
    (a) When was it put into effect and how has it changed over the years?
    (b) What has it accomplished?
    (c) How many students and teachers have been involved in it?
    (d) How much has it cost the district on an annual basis?
6. Describe how your students have performed on the test over the years it has been administrated. How would you describe the pattern of test scores on the BEST?

B. How much interest has there been in your district in the performance of your students on the BEST?

1. How interested have top school district administrators been and what has been their reaction to the test results?
2. How interested has the school board been and how have

they responded?

3. What about the general public here? How interested has it been and how has it been articulated and communicated?

4. What about teachers? What has been their reaction to the test and the performance of students on the tests?

5. Before the BEST was required by the state do you recall there being an interest in a minimum competency testing program here? Among professional educators in the district? On the school board? Within the general public?

6. Would you have had a minimum competency test of your own, if the state hadn't required the BEST?

7. Have you considered (or decided) to use the BEST as part of the high school graduation requirements in your district? Why has your district made this decision?

D. Describe what changes in your curriculum, if any, have occured as a result of the BEST.

1. Have there been over-all changes in the basic organization or rationale of the curriculum attributable directly or indirectly to the BEST?

2. Have there been other types of changes in the structure or organization of the curriculum resulting from the implementation of the BEST?

3. Have there been any changes in the sequencing of courses as a result of the BEST?

4. What about changes in the content of courses? The type of material used, e.g., textbook adoptions?

5. What about changes in teaching techniques or manner of presentation of material?

6. Over-all would you say that having the BEST has hurt or improved your basic curriculum?

7. Has the existence of the BEST tended to standardize curriculum more?

D. How and by whom are basic curriculum decisions made in your school?

1. Has this process changed in any way over the past few years--last 5 years, (e.g., different persons involved, more or less participation, more or less centralization of dicision-making).

E. What has been the reaction of teachers to the implementation of the BEST in your school?

1. Have student performances on the BEST been used in teacher evaluations and judgements?

2. Regardless of whether you think they have been used, have teachers feared that test results have been used for evaluation or that they might be?

3. In general have teachers been pleased or unhappy with changes that have taken place in the curriculum as a result of the BEST? Have teachers had more or less say over the curriculum in areas covered by the BEST?

4. On the whole would you say that teachers think that the existence of the best has improved, hurt, or had no impact of the type of education provided in this school?

F. What impact, if any, would you say the requirement of the BEST has had upon the allocation of resources within your school?

1. What have been the over-all monetary costs of implementing the BEST?

2. Has the implementation of the BEST caused monetary or other resouces tc be used or allocated differently? (e.g.,has the budget allocations been affect by the BEST?) If yes, in what way?

G. What would you say has been the overall impact of the BEST upon your school?

1. Some people view minimum competency testing programs such as the BEST primarily as means of HOLDING SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABLE for their educational tasks. Would you say that the implementation of the BEST in your school has helped in holding your school accountable?

2. Some see mimimum competency tests such as the BEST as a means of IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND STUDENT LEARNING. Do you think that the existence of the BEST has improved or hurt the quality of education in your school?

3. Some see minimum competency testing programs primarily as means of IDENTIFYING STUDENT EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS AND INTERVENTING TO CORRECT THEM. To what extent do you think the implementation of the BEST has served this purpose in your particular district?

4. Which of these three possible objectives: SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY; IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY; STUDENT DIAGNOSIS AND REMEDIATION -- has been the most significant impact of the BEST in your school or district?

5. If the BEST were no longer required by the state would you be in favor of keeping it or some similar sort of minimum competency test in your school? Why?

March 29, 1983

Dear (name of teacher),

As you may know the (name of school district) is participating in a study we are conducting on the impact of minimum competency testing programs, such as the (name of test program). We are looking at the impact of such tests in three school districts in Missouri and four in Ohio. We are particularly interested in secondary level tests such as the one you have in the tenth grade.

We have talked with other officials in your district about their opinions on the (level of test) test and how it has affected your schools. We are now trying to learn what impact teachers like you feel the test has had on the schools, the curriculum and the way they teach their classes. We think it very important to learn as much as we can about teacher reaction to these tests.

We will be in (name of district) on April 28th. We would like to schedule a time to talk with you on that day about your own assessment of the tenth grade test. (name of principal) suggested that your planning time (2nd Period) would be the most convenient time during the day to talk with you. We are enclosing a one page short questionnaire to provide the necessary background information for the personal interview, which should take around 40 minutes. Your name is not asked for on the questionnaire and your responses and assessments, of course, will be kept strictly confidential. We would like for you to take a few minutes to fill out the short questionnaire and to bring it with you to our interview scheduled for Thursday, April 28th during your planning period.

We think that the results of our study will be useful for your schools as well as for schools in other parts of Ohio and the nation, as they attempt to evaluate the use and consequences of minimum competency testing programs.

We look forward to meeting with you and learning how you think the implementation of the (name of program) test has affected your school.

Thank you,

Karen S. Dawson

Richard E. Dawson.

SCHOOL DISTRICT: ---------------------- -------------

SCHOOL: ----------------------------- -------------

TEACHER: ----------------------------- -------------

SUBJECT/GRADE TAUGHT: -------------------- --------------

DATE OF INTERVIEW: --------------------- --------------

INTERVIEWER: ------------------------- --------------

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: -------------------- ---------------

SHORT QUESTIONNAIRE

MINIMUM COMPETENCY TEST IMPACT STUDY.

(Please answer the following questions.)

1. Name of School District?

2. Name of School you are teaching in?

3. Length of time in teaching?

4. Length of time in present District?

5. Do you have tenure in your school district?

6 What courses are you teaching this school year?

FALL TERM.

Course title	Grade
a.	
b.	
c.	
d.	
e.	
f.	

SPRING TERM.

Course title	Grade.
a.	
b.	
c.	
d.	
e.	

f.

7. In the past five years (1978 - 1983) what grades and subjects have you taught?

Year	Subjects	Grade levels

8. In which courses that you currently teach do you cover materials included on the BEST?

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE SHORT QUESTIONNAIRE. PLEASE BRING IT WITH YOU TO YOUR INTERVIEW.

TEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Thank you for participating in our study. We want to learn what you as a teacher think about the BEST and the impact it has had on your school.

We are interested in your opinions on the impact of the test on your curriculum, on your activities as a teacher and on the students in the school.

Your responses will be kept confidential. The opinions you express will not be shown to or discussed with anyone.

1. To begin, could you describe briefly what impact you think the use of the BEST has had at this school?

2. What would you say has been its single most important impact?

3. What about the impact of the BEST on the school curriculum? How do you think the test has affected the currculum at this school?

4. What about your own teaching, how would you say the use of the BEST has affected how you teach your classes?

5. Has the existence of the BEST caused you to make any of the following changes in your courses? In considering each area try to refer only to changes that you think have occured as a consequence of the BEST.:

A. Has the existence of the BEST led you to change the content of your courses in any way? If so, how??

B. Has the BEST caused you to make changes in the sequence in which you present material? If so how?

C. Have you changed the amount of time you spend on particular parts of the curriculum as a result of the BEST? If so how?

D. Have you changed the textbooks you use as a result of the BEST? If so how?

E. Have you introduced supplemental material into your courses as a result of the BEST? If so in what area?

F. Have you used different methods or examples to present material? If so what are they?

6. How would you evaluate the impact of the BEST on your own teaching? Has it been:

a. Favorable? b. Neutral?
c. Unfavorable? or d. No impact.

7. In the teaching of your courses how much time do you devote specifically to teaching BEST related materials or objectives?

A. How much time each day?

B. How much time each week?

C. How much time in the course of the semester?

8. What additional record keeping, if any, has resulted for you as a teacher as a result of the use of the BEST?

9. How much money do you think your own school district has spent on implementing the BEST and helping to prepare students for it?

Would you say it has spent?:

a. A lot of money; b. Some money;
c. Little money; d. Not any money;.

10. Do you think that the BEST has meant that school resources, such as money and time, have been diverted from other aspects of the curriculum, and spent on BEST related activities? If so, what have they been taken away from?

11. There are many different opinions on how tests such as the BEST affect schools. Could you tell me whether you agree or disagree with these statements? In thinking about the statements refer only to the impact that the BEST has had upon the schools here.

a. The BEST has made the curriculum more standardized throughout the district.

a. agree; b. disagree.

b. As a result of the BEST, the making of decisions on the curriculum and course materials has become more centralized.

a. agree; b. disagree.

c. I feel that I have less say in what I teach in my own courses and when and how I teach particular materials.

a. agree; b. disagree.

d. There is considerable pressure to teach "for the test."

a. agree; b. disagree.

e. Teachers here feel under great pressure to make sure their students do well on the test.

a. agree; b. disagree.

f. The existence of the BEST has caused us to think more systematically about what we are trying to teach and how we do it.

a. agree; b. disagree.

g. The use of the BEST has meant that we emphasize minimum educational achievement instead of other educational objectives in our curriculum.

a. agree; b. disagree.

12. Do you feel that your performance as a teacher is now judged in any way by how well your students do on the best? If so, how?

13. How much attention is paid to the performance of students in this district on the BEST?

A. By teachers in this school?

a. a great deal; b. some;
c. not very much; d. none.

B. By administrators in this school

a. a great deal; b. some;
c. not very much; d. none.

C. By district administrators?

a. a great deal; b. some;
c. not very much; d. none.

D. By the local school board?

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a. a great deal; b. some;
c. not very much; d. none.

E. By the general public in this community.

a. a great deal; b. some;
c. not very much; d. none.

14. From which of the above groups do you as a teacher feel the greatest pressure for high test scores?

15. How does that pressure get transmitted?

16. Do you think the local community evaluates the job the local schools are doing by the performance of students on the BEST?

17. How seriously do you think the students here take the BEST?

18. Would you like to see the passing of the BEST used as a requirement for high school graduation? (OR: Do you like having the passing of the BEST as a requirement for high school graduaton?) Why or why not?

19. What things does your school do specifically to prepare students for the BEST?

A. The paper and pencil state test?

B. The locally assessed objectives?

20. Do you think that your school does too much, too little, or the right amount to prepare students for the BEST?

a. Too much. b. Too little, c. right amount.

21. In what ways has the publicity given the BEST scores of various school districts affected the use of the test in your distrct?

22. Which of the following do you think has been the single most important purpose served by the BEST in your district? (Give out Card)

a. As: A tool for evaluating and improving the curriculum.

b. As: A tool for diagnosing and remediating the particular problems of individual students?

c. As: A tool for evaluating the performance of the local schools and holding them accountable?

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23. Over-all how would you evaluate the impact of the BEST on your school?

Would you say that the impact has been:

a. very positive; b. generally positive; c. half good/half bad, d. generally negative; e. very negative?

24. Do you as a teacher ever use BEST score results to

diagnose individual student weaknesses?

25. Do you as a teacher ever use BEST scores to evaluate where greater emphasis needs to be in your classes?

26. Were you as a teacher involved in the implementation of the BEST here at your school?

27. Generally speaking do you think that teachers in this school are well informed about the BEST test and its objectives?

28. Thinking back to when the BEST was first introduced, can you think of any results from the test that have been a surprise to you; impacts you did not expect?

29. Would you choose to keep the BEST or a test like it in your school if it were not mandated by the state? Why or why not?

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